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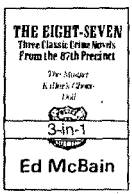

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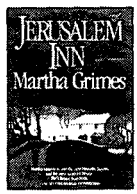

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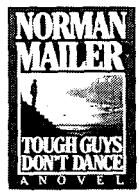

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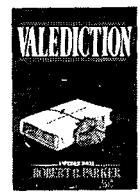

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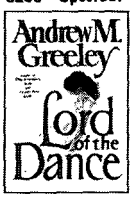

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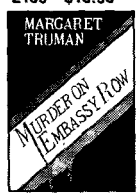

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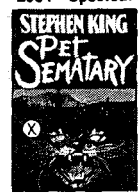

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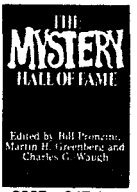

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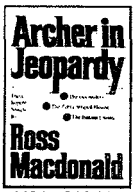

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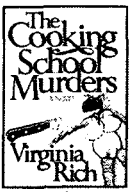

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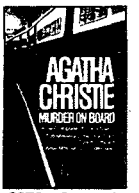

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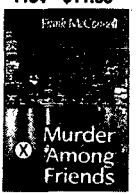

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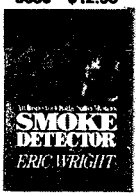

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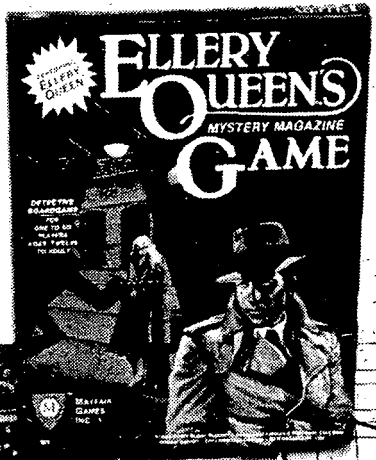

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THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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a *NEW* Black Widowers story by

ISAAC ASIMOV

Emmanuel Rubin said, "There is no such thing as a self-made man—or woman, for that matter—in post-World War II America. You can always find help making your way through school, tiding yourself over unemployment, getting grants of some sort to help you get started. Sure, you can make it, but not by yourself, never by yourself. There's a whole set of government apparatuses helping you."

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TRIPLE DEVIL

by ISAAC ASIMOV

It was not surprising that at this particular banquet of the Black Widowers the conversation turned on the subject of self-made men.

After all, Mario Gonzalo, host of the evening, was bringing as his guest the well known retired owner of a chain of bookstores, Benjamin Manfred. It was also well known that Manfred had delivered newspapers as a young lad more than half a century before and was the son of poor but honest parents—very honest, and very, very poor. And now here he was, not exactly a Getty or an Onassis, but very comfortably situated. And with four children and a number of grandchildren all engaged in dealing with one portion or another of the chain, he was even the founder of a dynasty.

Since Manfred had phoned to say, with many regrets, that he would be a little delayed but would certainly be there before the actual banquet was begun, it meant that the cocktail hour was

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taking place in his absence and the conversation could continue freely without the inhibition produced by the presence of one of those who was the subject of discussion.

It wasn't surprising that the loudest of the pontificaters was Emmanuel Rubin.

"There is no such thing as a self-made man—or woman, for that matter—any more," he said with passion, and when Rubin spoke with passion there was no choice but to listen. If his sixty-four inches made him the shortest of the Black Widowers, his voice was undoubtedly the loudest. Add to that the bristling of his sparse grey beard and the flashing of his eyes through the thick lenses that served to magnify them almost frighteningly, and he was not to be ignored.

"Ben Manfred is a self-made man," said Gonzalo defensively.

"Maybe he is," said Rubin, reluctant to make any exceptions to any generalization he had launched, "but he self-made himself in the nineteen twenties and nineteen thirties. I'm talking about *now*—post-World War II America, which is prosperous and welfare-minded. You can always find help making your way through school, tiding yourself over unemployment, getting grants of some sort to help you get started. Sure, you can make it, but not by yourself, never by yourself. There's a whole set of government apparatuses helping you."

"Perhaps there is something in what you say, Manny," said Geoffrey Avalon, looking down with a somewhat distant amusement. His seventy-four inches made him the tallest of the Black Widowers. "Nevertheless, wouldn't you consider yourself a self-made man? I never heard that you inherited or married wealth, and I don't see you, somehow, accepting government handouts."

"Well, I haven't gotten anything the easy way," said Rubin, "but you can't be a self-made man until you're *made*. If I didn't have a rich father, and don't have a rich wife, neither am I exactly rich myself. I can afford some of the niceties of life, but I'm not *rich*. What we have to do is define the self-made man. It's not enough that he's not starving. It's not enough that he's better off than he used to be. A self-made man is someone who starts off poor, without any money above the subsistence level. Then, without getting large slabs of money from the outside, he manages, through hard work and shrewd business acumen, or through enormous talent, to become a millionaire."

"How about luck?" growled Thomas Trumbull. "Suppose someone

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enters a sweepstake and wins a million dollars, or suppose he consistently backs winners at a racetrack?"

Rubin said, "You *know* that doesn't count. You're just a luck-made man then. That goes if you pull an old man from under a hackney coach and he calls down heaven's blessing on you and gives you a million dollars. And I'm not counting those people who get rich by illegal activity. Al Capone, from a standing start, was making sixty million dollars a year before he was thirty, at a time when the dollar was worth a dollar and not twenty-two cents. He paid no taxes on it, either. You can call him self-made, but not by my definition."

"The trouble with you, Manny," said Roger Halsted, "is that you want to restrict the term to people you approve of morally. Andrew Carnegie was a self-made man and he was a great philanthropist after he had made his millions, and, as far as I know, he was never put in jail. Still, on his way up I'll bet he engaged in questionable business activities and that he managed to grind the faces of the poor when that was necessary."

Rubin said, "Within the law is all I ask for. I don't expect people to be saints."

Gonzalo said, with a totally unconvincing air of innocence, "What about your friend, Isaac Asimov, Mannie?"

Rubin rose to the bait at once. "My *friend?* Just because I lend him a few bucks now and then to help him pay the rent—money that I don't ever expect to see again—he goes around telling everyone he's my friend."

"Come on, Mannie, no one's going to believe that libel. He's well heeled. And according to his autobiography, he started with nothing. He worked in his father's candy-store, and he delivered newspapers, too. He's a self-made man."

"Is that so?" said Rubin. "Well, if he's a self-made man, all I can say is that he certainly worships his creator."

There was no telling how long Rubin would have gone on to improvise variations on this theme, but it was at this moment that Benjamin Manfred arrived, and conversation stopped while Gonzalo made the introductions.

Manfred was of average height, quite thin, with a lined but good-natured face. His hair was sparse and white, his clothing neat and old-fashioned. He wore a vest, for instance, and one was surprised that the chain of a pocket-watch wasn't looped from one side to the other. He wore a wristwatch, instead, but it was so old-fashioned it had a stem-winder.

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He acknowledged the introductions with a pleasant smile, and when he shook hands with Rubin said, "I'm so pleased to meet you, Mr. Rubin. I read your mysteries with such pleasure."

"Thank you, sir," said Rubin, trying manfully to be modest.

"In my stores, I can always count on good sales for your books. You almost match Asimov."

And he turned away to greet James Drake, while Rubin slowly turned a furious magenta and the five other Black Widowers suffered substantial internal pain in their desperate efforts not to laugh.

Henry, the perennial waiter of the Black Widowers, having seen to it that the old man was supplied with a generous dry martini, announced that dinner was served.

Drake stubbed out his cigarette and looked at the small mound of caviar on his plate with pleasure. He helped himself to the condiments being passed around by Henry, hesitating at the chopped onion and then firmly taking two helpings.

He whispered to Gonzalo. "How come you can afford caviar, Mario?"

Mario whispered back. "Old man Manfred is paying me very nicely for a portrait he's sitting for. That's how I know him, and I might as well show him a bit of a good time with his money."

The table was exceptionally decorous. Rubin seemed subdued and let pass a dozen opportunities to tell Manfred what was wrong with the book-selling business and how it contributed to the impoverishment of worthy young authors.

If the Black Widowers were quieter for Rubin's withdrawal from the fray, they were happy enough, and loud in their praise of the courses as they passed—the turtle soup, the roast goose with the potato pancakes and red cabbage, the baked Alaska—and perhaps just a trifle less than tactful in their clear surprise that a dinner hosted by Gonzalo should have such Lucullan overtones.

Gonzalo bore it with good humor and, when it was time to tinkle the water glass melodiously with his spoon, he even made a noble attempt to mollify Rubin.

He said, "Manny, you're the book person here and as we all agree the best in your class, bar none. Would you please do the honors in grilling Mr. Manfred?"

Rubin snorted loudly and said with only his normal supply of grumpiness, "I might as well. I doubt that any of the rest of you are literate enough."

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He turned to Manfred and said, "Mr. Manfred, how do you justify your existence?"

Manfred did not seem surprised at the question. He said, "If there's one person who shouldn't have trouble justifying his existence, it's someone whose business it is to purvey books. Books, gentlemen, hold within them the gathered wisdom of humanity, the collected knowledge of the world's thinkers, the amusement and excitement built up by the imagination of brilliant people. Books contain humor, beauty, wit, emotion, thought, and, indeed, all of life. Life without books is empty."

Halsted muttered, "These days there's movies and TV."

Manfred heard. He said, with a smile, "I watch television also. Sometimes I will see a movie. Just because I appreciate a meal such as the one we have just had doesn't mean I may not eat a hotdog now and then. But I don't confuse the two. No matter how splendid movies and television may seem, they are junk food for the mind, amusement for the illiterate, a bit of diversion for those who are momentarily in the mood for nothing more."

"Unfortunately," said Avalon, looking solemn, "Hollywood is where the money is."

"Of course," said Manfred. "But what does that mean? Undoubtedly, a chain of hamburger joints will make more money than a four-star restaurant, but that doesn't convert hamburger to Peking duck."

"Still," said Rubin, "since we're discussing money, may I ask if you consider yourself a self-made man?"

Manfred's eyebrows lifted. "That is rather an old-fashioned phrase, is it not?"

"Right," said Rubin, with a stir of enthusiasm. "I maintained exactly that over the cocktails. It is my opinion that nowadays it is impossible for anyone to be a truly self-made man. There is too much routine government help."

Manfred shook with silent laughter. "Before the New Deal, that wasn't so. The government in those days was a highly moral and neutral referee. If a large corporation had an argument with a small employee, the government's job was to see that both sides had only the help they could afford. What could be fairer than that? Of course, the rich always won, but that was just a coincidence, and if the poor man didn't see that, the government sent in the National Guard to explain things to him. Those were great days."

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"Nevertheless, the point is that you were poor when you were young, were you not?"

"Very poor. My parents arrived in the United States from Germany in 1907 and brought me with them. I was three at the time. My father was employed at a tailor shop and made five dollars a week to begin with. I was the only child, but you can imagine how it improved his economic position when he had three daughters one after the other. He was a Socialist, and a vocal one, and as soon as he became a citizen he voted for Eugene V. Debs. This made some people, whose views on freedom of speech were strictly limited to freedom of *their* speech, feel he ought to be deported.

"My mother helped out by part-time work in between babies. From the age of nine, I delivered papers in the morning before school and had odd jobs after school. Somehow my father managed to accumulate enough money to make a down-payment on a small tailor shop of his own, and I worked with him after school. Once I turned sixteen, I didn't have to stay in school any more, so I quit to work in the shop full-time. I never finished high school."

Rubin said, "You don't sound like an uneducated man."

"It depends on how you define education. If you're willing to allow the kind of education you pick up for yourself in books, then I'm educated—thanks to old Mr. Lineweaver."

"This Mr. Lineweaver gave you books?"

"Only one, actually. But he got me interested in books. In fact, I owe nearly everything to him. I couldn't have gotten my start without him, so that maybe I'm *not* a self-made man. And yet he didn't *give* me anything, I had to work it out for myself, so maybe I *am* a self-made man."

Drake said, "You've got me confused, Mr. Manfred. What was it you had to work out for yourself? A puzzle of some sort?"

"In a way."

"Is it a well known episode in your life?"

Manfred said, "There was some mention in newspapers at the time, but it was a long time ago and it has been forgotten. Sometimes, though, I wonder how fair the whole thing was. Did I take advantage? I was accused of undue influence and who knows what, but I won out."

Rubin said, "I'm afraid, Mr. Manfred, I must ask you to tell us the story in detail. Whatever you say will be held completely confidential."

Manfred said, "So Mr. Gonzalo told me, sir, and I accept that."

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But for a moment his eyes rested on Henry, who stood with his usual air of respectful attention at the sideboard.

Trumbull caught the glance and said, "Our waiter, whose name is Henry, is a member of the club."

"In that case," said Manfred, "I'll tell you the story. And if you find it dull, you have only yourselves to blame."

"But wait," interjected Gonzalo eagerly, "if there's some kind of puzzle or mystery involved, I figure you solved it. Right?"

"Oh, yes. There's no mystery waiting to be solved." He waved his hands as though in erasure. "No puzzle."

"In that case," said Gonzalo, "when you tell the story about Mr. Lineweaver, don't tell us the answer to the puzzle. Let us guess."

Manfred chuckled, "You won't guess. Not correctly."

"Good," said Rubin, "please continue with the story, and we will try not to interrupt."

Manfred said, "The story starts when I was fourteen, just after the end of the war—the first one, World War I. It was Saturday, no school, but I still had papers to deliver, and the last stop on the route was an old mansion. I always left the paper in a little hook on the side of the door, and once a week I rang the bell and a servant came out and gave me the money for the papers and a quarter as a tip. The general tip was a dime so I was always grateful to this particular place.

"Saturday was collection day, so this day I rang the bell, and for the first time I could remember out came old Mr. Lineweaver himself. Maybe he just happened to be near the door when I rang the bell. He was about seventy and I thought he was just another servant—I had never seen him before.

"It was a bitterly cold day in January—1919, it was—and I was inadequately dressed. I wore the only coat I had and it was rather thin. My hands and face were blue and I was shivering. I wasn't particularly sorry for myself, because I had delivered papers on many cold days and that was the way it was, that's all. What could I do about it?

"Mr. Lineweaver was perturbed, however. He said, 'Come inside, boy. I'll pay you where it's warm.' His air of authority made me realize he was the owner of the house, and that scared me.

"Then, when he paid me, he gave me a dollar as a tip. I had never heard of a dollar tip. Next he brought me into his library—a large room with bookshelves from floor to ceiling on every wall, and a

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balcony with additional books. He had a servant bring me hot cocoa and he kept me there for almost an hour, asking me questions.

"I tried to be very polite, but I finally told him I had to go home or my parents would think I was run over. I couldn't call to reassure them—in 1919 very few people had telephones.

"When I came home, my parents were very impressed, especially with the dollar tip, which my father took and put away. It wasn't cruelty on his part—it was merely that there was a common coffer for the earnings of the entire family and none of us could hold out any of it for ourselves. My allowance for the week was exactly zero.

"The next Saturday, old Mr. Lineweaver was waiting for me. It wasn't nearly as cold as the week before, but he invited me in for hot cocoa again. When he offered me another dollar, I followed my father's instructions and told him it was too much and that a quarter would be enough. My father, I'm afraid, had learned from life to distrust unexplained generosity. Mr. Lineweaver laughed and said he had nothing smaller and that I must take it.

"I suspect he noticed the curious looks I was giving the books, for he asked if I had any books at home. I said my father had a couple but they were in German. He asked if I went to school and I said yes, but as soon as I was sixteen I would have to quit. He asked if I went to the public library, and I said that I did sometimes, but what with the newspaper delivery and the tailor shop I didn't really have much chance to do so.

" 'Would you like to look at these books?' he asked, waving his hands toward the walls.

" 'I might get them dirty, Mr. Lineweaver,' I said, looking at my hands, which were black with newspaper ink, of course.

"He said, 'I tell you what. On Sundays, when you have no school and the tailor shop is closed, you come here after you've delivered your papers and you can wash your hands and stay in the library as long as you want and read some of those books. Would you like that?'

" 'Oh, yes,' I said.

" 'Good,' he said. 'Then you tell your parents you'll be spending the time here.'

"I did, and for ten years I was there faithfully every Sunday except when I was sick or he was away. When I grew older I still came by on Saturday afternoons, and even on a few weekday evenings.

"He had a wonderfully wide variety of books for me to choose from, and was strong on British fiction. I read Thackeray and Trollope

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and puzzled over *Tristram Shandy*. I remember being fascinated by Samuel Warren's *Ten Thousand a Year*. It was a mixture of humor and incredibly reactionary politics. The anti-hero was Tittlebat Titmouse and there was a very effective villain named Oily Gammon. I eventually learned from my reading that 'gammon' was a slang term equivalent to our present slang term of 'boloney.'

"I read Pope, Byron, Shelley, Keats, Tennyson, Coleridge—didn't like Wordsworth or Browning, for some reason. There was lots of Shakespeare, naturally. I wasn't strong on non-fiction, but I remember trying to read Darwin's *Origin of Species* and not getting very far. There was a new book, *Outline of History* by H.G. Wells, that fascinated me. I read some American writers, too—Mark Twain and Hawthorne—but I couldn't stick *Moby Dick*. I read some of Walter Scott. All this was spread out over years, to be sure."

Trumbull stirred in his seat and said, "Mr. Manfred, I take it this Lineweaver was a wealthy man."

"Quite well-to-do, yes."

"Did he have children?"

"Two grown sons. A grown daughter."

"Grandchildren?"

"Several."

"Why did he make a surrogate son of you, then?"

Manfred considered. "I don't know. The house was empty except for servants. He was a widower. His children and grandchildren rarely came to visit. He was lonely, I suppose, and liked having a youngster in the house now and then. I'm under the impression he thought I was bright and he certainly enjoyed my pleasure in the books. He would occasionally sit and talk with me about them, ask me what I thought of this book or that, and suggest new ones I might read."

"Did he ever give you any money?" asked Trumbull.

"Only that dollar a week, which he handed me without fail each Saturday. Eventually I dropped the paper route, but he didn't know that. I kept on delivering his paper every day. I'd buy it myself and deliver it."

"Did he feed you?"

"The hot cocoa. When I stayed through lunch, a servant would bring me a ham sandwich and milk, or the equivalent."

"Did he give you books?"

Manfred shook his head. "Not while he was alive. Never. He wouldn't give me one or let me borrow one. I could read whatever

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I liked, but only as long as I sat in his library. I had to wash my hands beforehand and I had to put each book back on the shelf in the place where I had got it before taking another."

Avalon said, "I should think Mr. Lineweaver's children would resent you."

"I think they did," said Manfred, "but I never saw them while the old man was alive. Once he said to me, with a little chuckle, 'One of my sons said I must keep an eye on you or you'll take some of my books.' I must have looked horrified at the insult to my parents. Would that be the kind of son they would bring up? He laughed and tousled my hair and said, 'I told him he didn't know what he was talking about.' "

Rubin said, "Were his books valuable?"

"At the time it never occurred to me that they might be. I had no idea what books cost, or that some might be worth more than others. I found out, eventually, though. He was proud of them, you see. He told me he had bought every one of them himself. I said that some of them looked so old he must have bought them when he was a little boy. He laughed and said, 'No, I bought many of them in second-hand bookstores. They were old when I got them. If you do that, sometimes you can pick up some very valuable book for almost nothing. Triple devil,' he said. 'Triple devil.'

"I thought he was referring to himself and how clever he was to find these valuable books. Of course, I didn't know which ones might be the valuable ones.

"As the years passed, I developed an ambition. What I wanted was to own a bookstore someday. I wanted to be surrounded by books and sell them until I'd made enough money to build a library of my own, a collection of books I wouldn't have to sell and I could read to my heart's content.

"I told this to Mr. Lineweaver once when he questioned me about my future. I said I was going to work in the tailor shop and save every cent till I had enough to buy a bookstore—or maybe an empty store and then buy the books.

"Lineweaver shook his head. 'That will take a long time, Bennie. The trouble is I've got children of my own to take care of, even though they're a selfish lot. Still, there's no reason I can't help you out in some sneaky way that they won't be able to do anything about. Just remember I own a very valuable book.'

"I said, 'I hope it's hidden away, Mr. Lineweaver.'

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" 'In the best place in the world,' he said. 'Do you remember your Chesterton? What's the best place to hide a pebble?'

"I grinned. The Father Brown stories were new then and I loved them. 'On the beach,' I said. 'And the best place to hide a leaf is in a forest.'

" 'Exactly right,' said Mr. Lineweaver, 'and my book is hidden in my library.'

"I looked about curiously, 'Which one?' I asked, and was instantly sorry—he might have thought I wanted to take it.

"He shook his head. 'I won't tell you. Triple devil! Triple devil!' Again, I felt he was referring to his own slyness in not revealing his secret.

"In early 1929, ten years almost to the day after I had first met him, he died, and I received a call from his lawyers to attend a reading of the will. That astonished me, but my mother was in seventh heaven. She felt I would inherit a great deal of money. My father frowned and worried that the money belonged to the family and I would be a thief to take it from them. He was that kind of person.

"I attended, dressed in my best clothes, and felt incredibly ill at ease and out of place. I was surrounded by family, the children and grandchildren I had never before seen, and their looks at me were the reverse of loving. I think they too feared I would get a great deal of money.

"But they didn't have to worry. I was left one book—*one*—from his library. Any book I wished. It was to be my free choice. I knew he wanted me to have the valuable one, but he had never told me which one that was.

"The bequest didn't satisfy the family. You would think they could spare one book out of perhaps ten thousand, but they apparently resented my even being mentioned in the will. The lawyer told me I could make my choice as soon as the will was probated.

"I asked if I might go into the library and study the books in order to make that choice. The lawyer seemed to think that was reasonable, but it was objected to at once by the family, who pointed out that the will said nothing about my going into the library. 'You've been in the library often enough and long enough,' said the older son. 'Just make your choice and you can have it when the will is probated.'

"The lawyer wasn't exactly pleased by that and he said he would seal the library till probation, and *no* one could go in. That made

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me feel better, because I thought that perhaps the family knew which book was valuable and would remove it themselves.

"It took time for the will to be probated, so I refused to make the choice immediately. The family grumbled at that, but the lawyer held his ground. I spent the time thinking. Had old Mr. Lineweaver ever said anything to me that was puzzling and might have been intended as a hint? I could think of nothing but the 'Triple devil' he used to call himself when he wanted to praise his own slyness. —But he only said that when he discussed the valuable book. Could the phrase refer to the book and not to himself?

"I was twenty-four now, and far from the innocent child I'd been ten years before. Thanks to my reading, I had a vast miscellany of information at my fingertips, and so when the time came for me to make my choice I didn't have to walk into the library. I named the book I wanted and explained exactly where it would be on the shelves—for I had read it, of course, though I had never dreamed it was valuable.

"The lawyer himself went in and got it for me, and it was the right book. As a book dealer, I now know why it was valuable, but the point is that I had the lawyer—a good man—arrange to have it appraised and then sold at a public auction. It brought in seventy thousand dollars, a true fortune in those days. If it were offered for sale now it would bring in a quarter of a million but I needed the money *then*.

"The family was furious, of course, but there was nothing they could do. They brought suit, but the fact that they had not let me enter the library and study the books lost them a great deal of sympathy. In any case, after the legal hassle was over I bought a bookstore, made it pay through the Depression, when books were one form of relatively cheap amusement, and built things up to where they now are. —So am I a self-made man?"

Rubin said, "In my opinion, this doesn't come under the heading of luck. You had to pick one book out of ten thousand on the basis of a small and obscure hint, and you did. That's ingenuity, and therefore you earned the money. —Just out of curiosity, what was the book?"

"Hey," said Gonzalo angrily.

Manfred said, "Mr. Gonzalo asked me not to give you the solution. He said you might want to work on it yourselves."

The smoke from Drake's cigarette curled up toward the ceiling. He said in his softly hoarse voice, "One out of ten thousand on the

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basis of 'triple devil.' We never saw the library and you did. You knew what books were present and we don't. It's scarcely a fair test."

"I admit that," said Manfred, "so I'll tell you if you wish."

"No," said Gonzalo. "We've got to have a chance. The book must have had 'devil' in the title. It might have been *The Devil and Daniel Webster*, for instance."

"That's a short story by Stephen Vincent Benet," said Manfred, "and wasn't published until 1937."

Halsted said, "The usual image of the devil, with horns, hooves, and a tail, is drawn from the Greek nature-god, Pan. Was it a book about Pan, or with the word Pan in the title?"

"Actually," said Manfred, "I can't think of one."

Avalon said, "The witch-goddess Hecate is often thought of as triple—maid, matron, and crone—because she was a moon-goddess, too, and those were the phases—first quarter, full, and last quarter. As a witch-goddess, she might be looked at as a triple devil. *Memories of Hecate County* was published too late to be the solution, but is there something earlier with Hecate in the title?"

"Not that I know of," said Manfred.

There was a silence about the table, and Rubin said, "We just don't have enough information. I think the story was interesting in itself, and that Mr. Manfred can now tell us the solution."

Gonzalo said, "Henry hasn't had his chance. Henry—have you any idea what the book might be?"

Henry smiled. "I have a small notion."

Manfred smiled, too. "I don't think you'll be correct."

Henry said, "Perhaps not. In any case, people are often afraid to mention the devil by name, lest they call him up in the process, so they use numerous nicknames or euphemisms for him. Very frequently they use the diminutive of some common masculine name as a kind of friendly gesture that might serve to placate him. 'Old Nick' springs to mind."

Manfred half rose from his seat, but Henry paid no attention. "Once one thinks of that, it is simple to go on to think of *Nicholas Nickleby,* which, so to speak, is Old Nick twice, and is therefore 'double devil.' "

"But we want 'triple devil,' Henry," said Gonzalo.

"The diminutive of Richard gives us 'dickens,' a very well known euphemism for 'devil,' as in 'What the dickens?' And the author of *Nicholas Nickleby* is, of course, Charles Dickens. And there is the 'triple devil.' Am I right, Mr. Manfred?"

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Manfred said, "You're completely right, Henry. I'm afraid I wasn't as ingenious as I've thought these past fifty-five years. You did it in far less time than I did, and without even seeing the library."

Henry said, "No, Mr. Manfred. I deserve far less credit than you. You see, you gave the solution away in your account of events."

"When?" said Manfred, frowning. "I was careful not to say anything at all that would give you a hint."

"Exactly, sir. You mentioned so many authors and never once mentioned the outstanding English novelist of the Nineteenth Century—or probably any other century, or even perhaps any other language. Your failure to mention him made me think at once there was particular significance to the name Charles Dickens—and 'triple devil' then had no mystery to me."

"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

THE PREPRANDIAL KILLING

by LOLA STRONG JANES

'Twas a bright sunny day
In the middle of May
When the Widowers came to their meeting.
The beautiful weather
Brought them together—
They tarried outside and gave greeting,
Then lined up in pairs
And climbed up the stairs
And opened the door to their room.
No greeting they heard,
No—never a word—.
To lighten the silence and gloom.

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"Where's Henry?" they pined,
"It's time that we dined,"
Then they looked in the kitchen to see
Poor Henry was lying
On the floor—dying—
"Oh, Henry!" Drake cried. "Oh, dear me!"
"Who did this to you?
"And *what* did they do?"
A chorus of voices inquired.
A look of surprise
Glazed dear Henry's eyes—
He said, "I don't know," and expired.

To solve this foul deed,
It was, they agreed,
Their duty, and they'd never shirk it.
"D-d-damn!" Halsted howled,
And Tom Trumbull scowled.
"There's a puzzle in this and I'll work it,"
His swarthy face lined
With a frown, he opined.
"Oh, stop it, Tom!" Rubin began,
"You're only upset,
" 'Cause you'll never get
"A drink from a dying man!"

"A woman's involved—
"We find her, it's solved,"
Said Manny, "if this were *my* plot!"
Said Mario, "If
"It were we'd be stiff
"From boredom! Thank goodness it's not!"
They wrangled anew
While Mario drew
A caricature of their friend.
For each of them guessed
That Death was the guest,
And he'd have them all in the end.

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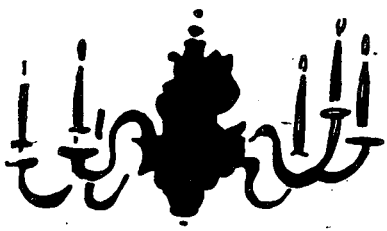
Roger said, "I've a clue,
"We must add t-two and two,"
Then Geoffrey's deep voice rang out clear,
"Just look at legality,"
He said with finality,
"We'll call the police—get them here!"
James Drake coughed and spoke
As he blew out smoke:
"I've called them and they're on the way."

Police came and went,
And many months spent,
But they made no arrest to this day.
So the group just dissolved
With the murder unsolved,
For alas, when it came right down to it,
Poor Henry was dead,
And without Henry's head,
They knew that they just couldn't do it.

"No ifs, ands, or buts,
"This Asimov's nuts—
"He's playing some horrible joke!"
I screamed out my rage
As I turned the last page,
And then—thank the Lord—I awoke.



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two *NEW* short stories by

SUZANNE JONES

In January's Department of "First Stories," we published three stories by Suzanne Jones, stories of such virtuosity that we have received much favorable comment about them. Following are two more shrewd tales by this exceptional newcomer, about two women who will haunt your memory, both in terminal stages of their lives—Eloise Crenshaw, who will conjure dark recollections of bleak high-school classrooms, and Clarise Cole, who has changed her mind about opting for death rather than suffering a long, painful illness . . .

ELOISE

by SUZANNE JONES

"Jessie Lawrence Smith was released from prison yesterday."

Eloise Crenshaw listened to that sentence carefully, held it in her mind and examined each of the words, and lingered over the unlovely word "prison."

The nurse nodded meaningfully, alert for any response.

Yes, Eloise thought she understood. Shyly, she studied the nurse's face. The nurse seem to expect some show of emotion from her. Fear, perhaps—but Eloise, although she knew she should be afraid, could not for the moment remember why exactly.

"Yes," she then said enthusiastically, pleased at remembering, "he'll want to see me." She smiled at the nurse, who suddenly looked weary. I must have said that before, Eloise thought. She's heard me say that before.

Embarrassed, she sat very still as the nurse folded up the news-

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paper and left her to enjoy the Texas sun and trying to remember just why it was that Jessie would come to her.

She focused her attention again on the yellow tablet with the pale-blue lines on which she had lettered in her careful, precise hand:

"The sum of our forgetting
Is one measure of loss."

She frowned and inserted the word "our" in front of "loss." She copied the lines again, so that they were perfect. She thought the lines might be poetry, but since she had never written poetry that was unclear.

The lines were suggested to her by something the doctor had said, the one who came to see her now every month or so. It was he who had also suggested she write. So she had written the lines. From day to day she changed them ever so slightly. A word added, a word subtracted, and, more rarely, one word substituted for another.

She looked at her own neat hand with pride, and then, her task done for the day, let her thoughts return to Jessie, trying to remember just why it was that Jessie would come to her.

It was so very long ago, years and years ago. She hadn't been young, she thought, even then. But she hadn't been so confused then. She remembered those few days ever so slowly as she gazed across the neatly clipped grass at the old man making his unsteady way on the arm of that new male nurse. She forgot the names. Sometimes the old man reminded her of her father.

It was a day that had started as many others. She sat as usual behind her desk on the raised platform at one end of the large room and calmly surveyed the emptiness. It was the time of day she liked best. She was still fresh and clean and untroubled, and therefore could take a kind of pleasure in the order and symmetry of the eight tables before her. Later in the morning, thirty-two adolescents would be writhing over sixteen frogs in various stages of dissection. The room would smell strongly of formaldehyde and perspiration. She didn't mind the formaldehyde; it had a preserving, purifying smell. It was the other that disgusted her, that partly drove her to those fits of temper that were mainly responsible for winning her the respect and fear of those thirty-two sweating bodies.

Eloise pressed her palms flat against the still cool grey top of her desk, cherishing the feeling. Later it would be warm and sticky beneath her hands.

Far off she heard a locker door bang. So they were coming. She

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looked at the watch on her thin wrist. She had very little time left now.

She rose and began to straighten the seams on her stockings, noting the uneven mounds of her calves and the blue-streaked thinness of her ankles. Again that familiar loathing. Eloise disliked her body. She felt it was something ugly in which she had been casually, randomly trapped.

Hitching her skirt a little higher, she looked at her legs without pity—the blue tunnels and tiny red lines against the mottled, bluish white. Somebody else's legs, she thought as she straightened her stockings. This isn't me. I'm not this ugly.

She stood there, arrested by that most singular thought, and so instead of being in her place, aloof and safe behind her desk, she was standing, surveying the thin folds of skin which protruded between the top of her stockings and the constraint of her girdle, when the boy came in.

She let the skirt fall, startled. He stopped and started back out the door in confusion.

She was badly shaken, but she calmed herself and with characteristic bravery shot out her thin, wavery greeting. "Good morning."

She said it with heroic indifference, curtly, the way she said it every morning. The important thing was to make him believe that he had not come in at that particular moment. He must believe that she was just sitting down when he came through the door. She felt her pulse slowing, and was thankful that her face did not burn. Now, almost fully regaining her poise, she said, "You're the new boy, aren't you?"

"Uh, yes, ma'am." He shoved the admittance slip across the great expanse of her desk, past the little metal calendar and the silk-and-paper rose and her cutting shears with their fine sharp blades. She picked up the slip and was starting to feel more in control of herself when he smiled. He smiled, ducking his head, a wide, loathsome smile with his lips stretched out of shape and parted a little so she could see the slimy white of his teeth and the pink of his tongue. She felt a roaring in her ears. Every move she had made to restore and collect herself was negated in that one brief instant.

Fool! You old fool!

Did she scream that?

No. The boy was still standing there with his head bent, smiling his lewd smile. She tried to regain her poise, control her feelings. He wouldn't be standing there like that if she had screamed.

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In twos and threes the other students were coming through the door and begining to cluster around the tables with the beautiful, shiny metal sinks with the long curved necks of the faucets poised above them. They looked at the new boy curiously, and there were whispers and giggles.

Eloise felt the familiar nausea of hatred start in the burning in her stomach. She wanted to wipe that obscene smile off his face with one quick claw. She let her great hooded eyes close over their glitter for a moment. When she spoke, she hardly recognized her own voice.

"Sit down," she said.

Again the studied politeness, and he had almost succeeded in erasing the smirk from his face. "There are no more places, ma'am."

She kept her voice low, controlled. "Then get a chair from the hall," she said. "Sit at Table Two."

She began the day as she had begun other days, holding her thoughts close to her, relying on a mechanically perfect memory, so that she was able to lean casually against the chalk tray and outline the week's experiments without disturbing her deeper thoughts. Those thoughts circled her wound delicately, with caution.

Listening to her voice, she was caught momentarily by the crispness of her enunciation and delighted in it. But the delight slid off into something akin to pain as she let her eyes rest on the dirty yellow hair of the boy with the smile. The smile was almost gone but traces of it clung to the sides of his thin mouth. She caught herself in loathing, and her voice skipped a measured, mechanical beat. She smoothed out the sentence and went on to explain the tagging procedure for the frogs. Her eyes moved to the rows of cases against the wall which enclosed snakes and lizards and unborn mice, their delicate scents mixed with the preserving fluids in their jars. She kept her eyes from the boy, but her thoughts returned to him. He would tell the others. Of course he would. And they would laugh. A hard little knot formed inside her throat, making it difficult to keep the flow of sentences going to the end of the instructions.

"All right," she said, "you may begin." She retreated to the raised platform as they rushed to pull the frogs from the glass jars.

She dropped into her chair and placed her hands on the arms. It was good to sit in her great chair behind the solid grey desk on top of the platform at the end of the room. The sounds washed over her, comforting her with their sameness: the giggles and mock declarations of horror, the clink of glass, and the rubbery sound of the little shears making the first incisions.

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The admittance slip caught her eye, and she opened her black-covered gradebook and carefully entered the name in block letters beneath the row of typewritten names. Jessie Lawrence Smith. She loathed the name as she loathed the dirty yellow hair and wide thin lips.

That smile should cost him something, she thought. But she would have to wait. For something particular and appropriate. It would have to be real. She was not a vindictive person. He would pay, but it would be because he would do something wrong. Not just walk through the door a few minutes early. No, he would do something wrong, and she would punish him justly.

She snapped the notebook shut as the office girl came forward importantly, a pink slip of paper in her hand. Eloise accepted it without thanks. She knew what it was. A telephone message. The message was always the same: "Your father wants you to call home."

She glanced at it and when the class was over she went to the office.

"Yes, Dad."

"I don't feel well this morning."

A long pause. Finally she said, "I'm sorry." She sighed. "Do you want to go to the doctor this afternoon?"

"I think I'd better. There's the pain again in my shoulder. Maybe he could give me a shot—"

She said nothing.

"I haven't seen him since last Monday," he said defensively.

"All right," she said at last. "I'll try to leave a little early."

"You'll come as soon as you can?"

"As soon as I can. Goodbye, Dad, I've got a class."

"Goodbye. You won't forget?"

She replaced the telephone, conscious of the stare of the office girl. She left the office and went back to her desk and the eight tables and the next thirty-two.

As soon as that class was over, the chemistry teacher, McKenna, stuck his head in the door. "Faculty meeting tomorrow morning at seven-thirty."

She dismissed him with a nod. She didn't particularly enjoy faculty meetings, but she didn't really mind them. As long as they let her alone, they could talk about class attendance and sportsmanship and discipline until they floated around the room. She would sit,

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tucking her secret portraits to herself and lowering her hooded eyes so they couldn't read themselves there.

The rest of that day passed about the way she thought it would. The tiny snip of the shears and the uncomplaining frogs. The smell, the heat, the impatience. She was almost glad to leave early. She gave the last class a pop quiz and had the office girl come in and monitor while she took her father to the doctor.

Her eyes took in her father the way they took in everyone else, even herself: without pity. He was old and had the same hooded eyes and aquiline nose as she, but his nose was laced with thin red lines, and his lower lip, instead of being firm, almost arrogant, drooped conspicuously since his stroke. He had little feeling in the lip and had to remember to suck on it now and then to keep the saliva from running down his chin. The noise it made disgusted her. The sharp, old smell of his body disgusted her. She didn't even mind now that he didn't love her—she had almost forgotten the time when that was important to her.

The nurse took him right in to the doctor and Eloise sat in the cool, shadowy waiting room, staring straight ahead, dimly hearing the sighs, sniffles, and coughs around her. She liked the smells in the doctor's office. They were clean. She wished her father smelled like that, or even like one of the frogs.

After a time he came out, shuffling slowly, almost blindly, holding his arm, and she could tell from that, and from the euphoric smile that picked up the corners of the dead lip, that he had gotten his shot. She took his other arm and helped him to the car. He opened his mouth and said "Ah" several times. She started the car. Without moving his head, which he had thrown back against the seat, he reached over and patted her knee woodenly. "You're a good girl," he said.

The highest form of praise, she thought indifferently. Compensation for eight years of my life. Perhaps for the rest of my life.

"You don't believe in God, do you?" he almost sneered.

"You know what I believe," she said flatly. Suddenly she was tired. Home would be a cool place in which to lie down.

"But—" he paused for a moment, organizing his words behind his lip "—there might be a God, mightn't there?"

She shrugged.

"And there might be a life after death, mightn't there?" His watery eyes drew hers to them. He nodded up and down, as if to strengthen his argument. "Mightn't there?"

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She understood what he wanted from her, that uneasy old man, and an icy smile broke across her face. "No," she said and returned her eyes to the road as his gaze faltered.

"You don't think so," he said.

"No," she said firmly.

He didn't speak again until after they were home.

It wasn't until the next morning when she had seated herself at the long table in the conference room that she remembered about the boy—and felt anxious again. She told herself to think about something else. Think about that fat fool who signs your paychecks, the one who was prancing and tittering at the end of the table. Max Voss. She amused herself by dissecting every fat corpuscle of Mr. Voss, from his plump little hands to his plump little feet.

The meeting dragged on and on, but its tediousness comforted her. It stood between her and the boy like a soft grey blanket. But eventually Voss called the meeting to a close, and then she felt isolated and exposed.

She went bravely into the classroom, her shoulders thrown back, her face fixed. Yes, he was there, but he didn't look up at her when she came in. She had tested her courage by deliberately looking at him, but he had not answered the challenge. That over, she opened her book and began to ask the incisive questions that made her students fear unpreparedness.

Consciously or not, she reserved one of the harder questions for the boy. When he could not answer it, she stared at him in disgust. It was a favorite look of hers, and was justly infamous, but the boy just ducked his head and smiled that by now familiar, obscene smile.

"Does the question amuse you?" she asked.

"No, ma'am."

"Something seems to amuse you," she snapped, and then realized that perhaps she had better pass over this and wait for another time.

"Yes, ma'am." He stared at her boldly, the corner of his mouth twitching.

In confusion she rapidly asked another question of another boy, and went on to the experiment, leaving the boy smiling to himself.

She held her rage tightly inside as she watched the students retrieving their poor frogs. What a fool she'd made of herself. And they all couldn't help but know it. They all saw.

He wasn't afraid of her.

There was a crash from the corner of the room. She was there in

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an instant, and she could hardly believe it. It was the boy. He had broken one of the frog jars and was surrounded by frogs and broken glass and formaldehyde.

She lashed out at him for his clumsiness, and when he offered an excuse she made it appear that the accident was not accidental.

"You go to hell!" he exploded, his eyes narrowed and his fists clenched. He was as big as she, and she had almost made him cry. "You go to hell!" he repeated.

"Get out," she said calmly. "Get out of this class."

He didn't pause to pick up his books on the way out.

The class was shocked and silent. Eloise breathed the cloudy, comforting smell of the formaldehyde and the frogs. "Clean up this mess," she told one of the boys and resumed her place behind the desk on the raised platform. "What are you all standing around for? Get to work."

They obeyed nervously, and soon the only sounds in the room were the snip of the shears and the occasional murmur of awe as a frog exposed a secret place.

She put a hand on each of the chair arms and permitted a small smile to work its way into one corner of her mouth. The boy would have to apologize, of course. He would have to apologize so that there would be no resistance left in him. As enjoyable as the incident over the broken jar might have been, the real pleasure would be in having him stand before her in the presence of Voss, telling the principal how sorry he was that he had had the impudence to challenge her. He was no match for her. He hadn't realized that, of course, when he had come through the door and laughed at her. But he would realize it then—she would see to that. She would make him understand.

About halfway through her next class, Eloise received the word for which she had been waiting. The office girl sat in on her class, and Eloise hurried to the office.

The boy, sullen and red-eyed, was in the outer office. He didn't look up as she entered, and that annoyed Eloise. Her look was wasted on the dirty yellow head. She swept by him into the inner office.

Max Voss got up from his desk and hurried her to a chair, worry lines crisscrossing his plump little face. "Sit down, Eloise, sit down."

He raced back to his desk. "Well, now, I understand there was a little disturbance in your eight o'clock today." He blinked, waiting

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for her to respond. When she said nothing, he continued, "He's a new boy, I believe. Uh, Jessie Smith. Is that right?"

"That's his name." Eloise felt a calm suffuse her body. It was gratifying to sit in the office of this ridiculous little man, in his dark warm office, and anticipate her victory.

"Yes, well. I understand you, well, asked him to leave your class because of some disturbance." He grinned foolishly. "Is that right?"

"That is correct."

He wants me to like him, Eloise thought suddenly. Max Voss actually wants me to like him. Max Voss wanted everything on an "even keel"—"Let's keep things rolling smoothly." How disagreeable this must be to him, Eloise thought. He hadn't the capacity to understand the significance.

She listened indulgently to his efforts to elicit sympathy from her, his attempts to patronize her, and watched him wipe the palms of his hands repeatedly on a handkerchief. He would be thinking, Most unpleasant situation, most unpleasant, even while he was chuckling, minimizing the importance of the events.

Suddenly she was alarmed. Suppose he decided to laugh the whole affair off? There was something terribly ludicrous in the smashing of a jar of frogs. But the profanity. He would be able to get around the profanity—

"Now about the boy's language. I've talked it over with him, and he agrees it was out of line but he was a little upset at the time. He realizes the gravity of the situation, I believe. And I think once he's made the adjustment here, he'll come along fine. His family has moved around quite a bit and it may take him a while to settle in."

Voss stood up briskly. "I think we've about covered everything, Eloise, and I appreciate your taking the time to come here and discuss the matter. I trust you won't have any more trouble with the boy, but if you do have any more problems, remember, that's what I'm here for."

He smiled, a wet, patronizing smile and opened the door for her.

She slammed it shut.

"He's not coming back to my class."

Voss's jaw sagged. "But I thought we agreed—" he stammered.

"You agreed," Eloise corrected. "I won't have him back in my class without an apology."

Voss avoided her eyes. "Well, to tell you the truth I was a little afraid of that. I thought of that right off—thought the simplest way to handle it was to get the boy to apologize for his behavior. He

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would still receive a poor mark for conduct, of course, but he wouldn't miss enough class time to affect his grade." He paused, taking out his handkerchief again. "I talked to the boy, Eloise, but he won't apologize. He doesn't think it was his fault."

"He broke the jar," she said in disbelief.

"Oh, yes, he admits he broke the jar, but he—uh—thought you—er—abused him unduly."

Eloise stared at him.

"Now, I realize that we all make mistakes in the heat of circumstance, Eloise, but perhaps you were a bit rough on the boy. He's new here, after all—"

"He must apologize," she said. "His conduct was inexcusable."

"I wish you'd try to look at the big picture, Eloise."

Voss studied the ceiling for a moment and Eloise knew he was going to lie to her.

"The boy's father is an executive with that electronics firm that just moved into town. Naturally, he's going to be interested in the school system here. I don't think it would be a good idea to alienate these people before they get to know us. The boy's record—"

"He must apologize," she repeated. "*When* he apologizes I will admit him to class. Not before."

She left the office angrily. Who did he think he was, telling her how to deal with her students? She had never had a discipline problem before. Never. They were afraid of her. She knew it—the whole school knew it.

She walked back to class and dismissed the office girl. Her anger changed shape. She could keep the boy out indefinitely, and he would fail, but there would be little satisfaction in that. The others would make him a hero. Somebody who stood up to her. What was a grade? A mark on a piece of paper. If she failed him, she would be cheated. What she wanted was him standing in front of her desk apologizing. The words would shrink him in significance until by the time he had finished he would no longer exist for her—he would recede into the blur of faces that gaped up at her every day. Eloise squirmed uneasily. He must apologize.

One class dragged by as cheerlessly as the last and still no one appeared to summon her until just before noon the office girl appeared in the doorway. Eloise felt an unfamiliar surge of joy until she was handed the familiar pink slip. She opened it, letting the disappointment bite into her body. "Your father wants you to call home . . ."

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Neither the boy nor Voss were in the outer office. Mechanically, Eloise went through the motions of placing the call. The phone rang for a long time and when he answered her father's voice sounded faint and far away.

"I've got to go to the doctor, girl."

"I can't leave early today, Dad. I just can't." I have to stay, she thought. Suppose they were to come after I had gone—

"I hurt real bad, girl, in my chest. You've got to come."

"Tomorrow, Dad. I've got to stay late today."

"I said I'm in pain. I can't wait."

You can wait, she thought angrily. You've made me wait often enough in eight years. Then, suddenly uneasy, she said, "Look, I'll take you when I get home. If the office is closed, I'll call the doctor to come to the house."

"I want him now," the old man whined.

"I can't now," she snapped. "I have to go. I'll talk to you later." She put the receiver down quickly before he could say anything more. I have to stay, she thought. What if they should come?

All day she waited. She made herself easy to find, eating lunch in the classroom. She cancelled the field trip for the afternoon class and gave them a test instead.

As the last bell rang, she had almost given up hope. She sat in her chair and stared at the pile of unopened pink slips the office girl had brought during the day.

"Oh, good—I was afraid you'd gone." Voss edged nervously through the door.

Relief warmed her, melting away the tension that had built up in her throughout the long day. She stood and waited. She would waste no more words on Voss.

She allowed herself a small smile as the boy followed Voss into the room.

"I've—uh—had a long talk with Jessie here, Miss Crenshaw, and I think—well, I think I've made him see the error of his ways, so to speak." Voss nudged the boy forward.

Eloise breathed through her nose. Her back was rigid. "Yes?"

The boy began, half mumbling his words. "I'm very sorry I broke the jar. I should have been more careful. I know things like that cost money, and it made a big mess with the frogs and all. Anyway, I just wanted you to know I'm sorry I did it."

The smile left Eloise's lips. That wasn't all. That couldn't be all.

"And I'm sorry I said what I did to you. I didn't meant to insult

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you or anything." He shifted his weight. "I just got mad, and I shouldn't have. Anyway, I'll try real hard to do better. I want to come back to class tomorrow, if I can."

Eloise nodded. It was worth it all, all the anxiety and pain, to have him standing awkwardly like that below her. He seemed a long way off now—small and without importance. A thin boy with dirty yellow hair. She stared at him contemptuously. "You may come back whenever you choose," she shrugged.

"Thank you, ma'am." He raised his head a little, so that their eyes met. And he smiled. Just a faint smile, his thin lips just suggesting, rather than forming the line. He smiled to let her know that he understood all of it, what she had done and why, and she felt it pierce her breast.

"Well, then, that's that," Max Voss said. "I hope your father's all right, Eloise," he said automatically. "I'm off. See you in the morning."

Out of the corner of her eye she could see the office girl had come in, her face flushed. "Miss Crenshaw, the hospital called about your father—"

Eloise remembered that the rest of the sentence receded from her like a train pulling away because she was no longer conscious of anyone or anything but the boy with the thin mouth that was almost smiling.

Numbly, she heard the girl go, but she didn't take her eyes from the face of the boy who did not go. Her long thin shears, sharp as twin razors, found their way into her hand. Then there was the pain—again and again—terrible, searing, cleansing, and, everywhere, the blood.

Max Voss had lied to her, as she thought. Mr. Smith was no executive. In fact, there was no Mr. Smith. The boy lived with an aunt. There was no money for a lawyer, and the public defender believed Jessie's story no more than the jury.

He had savagely attacked his teacher. The wounds were there for all to see, deep and destructive—multiple, angry wounds. Only his youth limited the years of his punishment.

As they dragged him away, he kept screaming at Eloise, who sat unmoved, swathed in her bandages, black mourning dress, and perfect vindication.

Eloise stretched herself in the sun, satisfied with her recall. Each time she thought on those long-ago events, the images were a little

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simpler, like stones worn smooth by constant touching. What details that were lost from time to time only seemed to strengthen the recall of other moments, making the images stronger and more vivid. She no longer remembered the exact geometric design of the folded pink slips of paper on her desk. She no longer remembered the pattern the spots of blood had made, spattering as if they had been slung from an angry brush.

She turned her thoughts to the present. Jessie was free at last and would be coming to her. Others over the years might have disappointed her, seldom coming to see her, or not coming at all, but she was sure in her heart that Jessie would come. Her last visitor.

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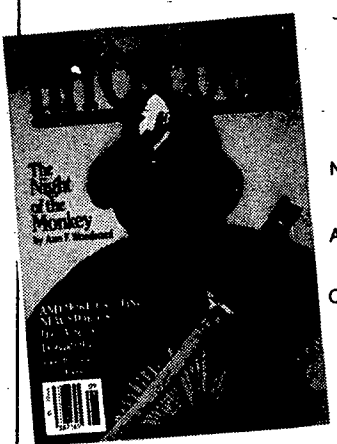

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CLARISE

by SUZANNE JONES

Clarise Cole had two real problems. For one, she was dying. For the other, someone was trying to kill her.

They had found the tumor on her lung in August. She always thought of him as "they" even though she knew very well who it was. A tan young doctor in sunglasses with white, white teeth.

"But the pain," she tried to explain, "is in my legs."

"It often shows up there first," he said.

Six months to a year, he said. So she had started treatments, her husband driving her the thirty miles from the lake to Austin once a week.

"Trying for the year," she said angrily.

She hadn't told everyone. Only her husband, her daughter, her bridge partner, and her hairdresser. Not in that exact order.

Her hair fell out. She bought wigs. She felt bad most of the time. It was painful to walk.

And she was bored again. After the novelty of the doctors, the tests, the uncertainties, she was faced again with the tediousness of her existence, made even less endurable by the increasing discomfort of her illness and the disgusting side effects of its treatment.

Then on the morning of the last day of September, someone shot the glass full of her salty dog right out of her hand. The fragments disappeared instantly, the liquid vanishing in a yellow flash.

She got three small cuts on her right hand and found herself inside the house so quickly she hadn't time to consider the pain of locomotion. She peered cautiously around the clay pot Julia had bought in Mazatlan that stood on the porch near the sliding glass doors.

No one and nothing moved in the heat except the birds—mostly the homely, brownish-black cow birds and a shiny boat-tailed grackle—which had scattered at the noise and resumed their search for the birdseed she placed on the large flat rock at the edge of the terrace each morning. Only the tiny scrape of beak against stone disturbed the stillness. All else was shocked into silence.

Now that alcoholism and lung cancer no longer concerned her,

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Clarise was given to smoking and brooding on the terrace in the mornings over gin and grapefruit juice, examining a life that she felt betrayed by. She was a small woman who had always been full of energy, attacking each moment life offered her. But this second marriage, this life of retirement for Clarise, who had worked for so many years for herself, her mother, and her child, had quickly palled. There was nothing to do.

She had landscaped the yard between the house and access road twice, hauling rocks and cactus from one corner of the land to the other—but there was only so much one could do with five acres of rock and sand. She wrote a few feature stories for the local paper, but discovered that it paid less than her expenses. She played bridge once a week at the club in town, but her husband hated that. He hated her to be driving after dark, he said, but she suspected he just hated having her out of sight for so long. His possessiveness which at first she found flattering now oppressed her.

He and his first wife had been her best friends. She had known them for forty years, and when Julia died of cancer three years ago she had willed Kent to Clarise, in so much as one person can dispose of another. And Clarise had been tired of working at the newspaper in Dallas. Her mother was in poor health, her child grown and gone, and the demands on her time, energy, and pocketbook were great.

Besides, she might have loved him. Certainly she had been fond of him. He was considerably older than she, retired some twenty years before when he was still a fairly young man to build this house on the lake for Julia and himself. He was well read, given to quoting poetry when drunk and making up statistics in the heat of arguments, but in good health, comfortable, and lonely.

So they had married, her mother had died soon after, and now, according to her daughter who was in Denver and thirty-eight and still trying to find herself, she was well taken care of. But Clarise was bored beyond belief and resentful that she was dependent on a man again. Twenty-five years ago her husband had run off with one of her best friends, and she had almost died of mortification since she had considered during the fifteen years or so that she had been married that she was the one who was wasting her time. She knew she blamed the whole sex for the imperfections of the small sample she had known, but in her heart she was sure that men were not only not the superior creatures they thought themselves, but quite inferior to women of intelligence and some education.

Anyway, she had married again too impulsively, it now seemed

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to her, and she was wretched with boredom and resentment. Even finding Twyla, her bridge partner, hadn't helped much. Twyla's husband had been a golf pro, who had retired to the lake and dropped dead six weeks later. Twyla had two children who lived in Victoria and one grandchild that Clarise tried not to envy. Clarise and Twyla played bridge at the club or, when they couldn't get up a foursome (which they preferred), sat on the porch and drank salty dogs or beer and talked about men and philosophy and the worthlessness of almost everything. Clarise had opened her heart to Twyla.

She couldn't remember if it was she or Twyla who had first proposed that the difference between wanting to live or die could be as little a thing as the light in October.

The discussion ensued because of the death of Clarise's mother, which had been painful and lengthy, and the recent death of Twyla's sister. Clarise thought it was Twyla who maintained that although each of them at that very moment (one Thursday afternoon last year sitting on Clarise's porch overlooking the lake) would certainly opt to die before suffering like that, once one were in that situation, one's convictions—though firmly held now—might change. Just to see the morning sky might cause one to wish to continue to exist. The sunlight of October, so mellow the way it fell over the hills and the lake might be enough. Just breathing might be enough.

Clarise considered these assertions with the seriousness they deserved, but argued that no one should suffer. Certainly she did not want to suffer. One shouldn't wait until too late to make that particular decision. Twyla agreed.

Clarise now regretted the precipitancy of her argument.

"Do you have a gun?" she greeted her husband when he returned home from getting the mail, as he did every day at that time.

When she told him about it, he said he thought it was just one of those kids down at the lake, "plinking." Nobody would purposely take a shot at her. Certainly not her best friend.

Her jaw set stubbornly, she dialed Twyla's number. "I didn't appreciate that," she said. "I've changed my mind, and I've a right to."

There was a slight pause.

"Clarise, darling, if I were you, I'd change my mind, too. I don't blame you one bit. It's like we said. Your whole perspective has changed. But don't you worry, I'm your friend."

Twyla hung up before Clarise could respond.

She looked at her husband's disbelieving face.

"She's trying to kill me."

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"But why?" Her husband was too sensitive to state the obvious. "She could just—well—wait."

So. He wasn't that sensitive.

"She doesn't want me to suffer."

"That's crazy."

"So's she."

He spread his hands helplessly. "Do you want me to call the sheriff?"

"Do you think he'd believe me?"

"A woman like Twyla Chamberlain? Absolutely not. He'll say it's one of those kids at the lake—"

"I know. Plinking."

He had a gun and eventually got it out to humor her. It was an old revolver he had carried in World War II. He didn't know if it would still fire or not. He didn't like guns.

He found the shells for her and reluctantly showed her how to cock and fire the weapon. She set up some tin cans on the rocks below the terrace, held the old gun in both hands, and cocked and squeezed. The sounds hurt her ears.

Kent shook his head and left her there. She hated him for not taking her seriously. Twyla was clearly mad as a hatter and had as much as admitted her guilt.

She spent the first six shells before she bagged her first can. The sun was high now and very hot. She felt sick at her stomach as she lifted the gun and fired. She found after a time that if she squeezed gently, almost tenderly, the cans disappeared with a satisfyingly violent clatter. She also found that propping the gun up on a rock steadied her hand and improved her aim. She learned how to reload, slipping the shells smoothly into the chambers in the cylinder.

When she was five out of six, she stopped. Twyla was a lot bigger than a tin can.

She walked slowly back up the slope toward the house. She could see her husband sitting in the shade of the porch, beer stein in hand. She felt now only a mild contempt for him. She would take care of herself now. She was used to that.

The smell of cordite lingered on the heavy air, and the weight of the gun comforted her. She'd see about Twyla.

She took two blue pills and a yellow one and lay down. She thought about her husband on the porch. Her hairdresser said Clarise had made quite a catch. There was many an old widow woman on the

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lake disappointed, she said, when Julia died and Kent went all the way to Dallas for his bride.

Had Twyla been one?

She shook her head just on the edge of sleep. No. If so, Twyla could afford to wait, a year or so at most. She was no older than herself. Twyla was her friend. But crazy. Clarise felt a little pity for her.

The next morning she got up very early before the sun had come up over the lake, while the mist still floated mysteriously along the surface of the water. She could hear the birds calling across the grey stillness and the sudden beat of the wings of the water fowls.

She no longer shared her husband's bedroom, since she had trouble sleeping since her illness and had taken a room of her own, the one that used to be her mother's and Julia's before that. She took two pillows from the bed and her second best chenille robe, the green one, and crept onto the terrace below the porch. She arranged the pillows, which were old and slack as her own body, in her favorite chair and bound them in her robe. She placed a paperback of *New York Times* crosswords in the "lap" and topped the second pillow with the sunhat she usually wore. (She didn't need skin cancer on top of everything else.)

She surveyed her creation critically. She arranged the table with its glass of grapefruit juice a little more artfully. She hadn't bothered to add gin. Then she went back to bed for a while. She didn't expect Twyla before the time Kent normally left to go for the mail. It was another thing she disliked about him: his insistence on his routine. Rain or shine, he got up, made the coffee, shaved and showered, and went to the post office at the dam, then to the grocery store, and usually to the liquor store. Every day, need something or not, except for Sundays and holidays.

She heard him rise and putter about and look in on her with a sigh before he left. She heard the door slam and the car start. All familiar, comfortable sounds. He still didn't believe her about Twyla.

She lay there relaxed, enjoying the last coolness of the early morning, when her eyes flew open in horror. She had forgotten the birds!

It had been her intention to gather up the gun and conceal herself in the group of rocks just off the south side of the house and wait for Twyla. But now the birds would warn Twyla. There was no food set out for them. The greedy things would wheel and cry about the

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rock and the green figure in the chair on the terrace would remain oblivious and still. The cow birds would certainly betray her.

Perhaps there was still time.

Clarise arose, got the birdseed from the kitchen pantry, and cautiously slipped the gun beneath the belt of her robe. She was fearful that the gun would discharge accidentally and maim her, but she needed both hands for the sack.

She peered carefully through the glass doors. Nothing moved in the morning heat. She hestitated and then returned to the kitchen. She let herself out the kitchen door and circled the rear of the house, moving slowly and carefully past the pile of rocks, behind which she intended to take up her vigil. Her legs ached, making it difficult to move with any speed.

She ducked down along the edge of the terrace, but felt exposed in the bright light. She supposed Twyla would park her car in the trees below the house where the access road joined the highway. She wouldn't be able to see Clarise from that direction until she, Twyla, came to higher ground.

At last Clarise worked her way as far as the edge of the rock. Already a few cow birds hopped about in irritable reproach as she opened the bag.

The green figure in her chair literally exploded before her eyes before she even heard the shot. She crouched trembling below the rock.

Her mouth was dry and her wig askew.

She pulled cautiously at the gun in her belt. It was caught.

She heard the slow, careful steps come across the terrace to her ruined robe and then the exclamation of surprise. She tugged the gun free and tried to breathe deeply without coughing. She was sorry anew she smoked so much. She concentrated on the stems of her gladiolas, stiff and dusty green. They filled her whole horizon.

"Clarise? You clever girl, where are you?" Twyla's rough voice.

Clarise heard the steps move away from her toward the house.

"Come on out and let's get this over with. You were never right for him, anyway—never appreciated him. Just like Julia."

Clarise froze. She believed she had just discovered fire ants in her gladiolas and had heard a terrible truth.

But why couldn't Twyla wait? Was a year worth all the risk?

As if in response, Twyla goaded her.

"How much of his money can you go through in a year? Doctors, hospitals, drugs. Medicare doesn't pay for everything, you know.

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Each day you live you make him poorer. And for what? You're going to die, anyway. This way you won't suffer. This way he and I can be together and there'll be a little left for us. He'll choose me next, I know he will. I was too cool, too casual before. I won't make that mistake again."

Clarise almost blacked out with rage. She rose up and fired in the direction of the large figure with the rifle. She missed by a good three feet and blew Julia's Mexican clay pot into oblivion.

Twyla whirled and fired, and Clarise felt the wig ripped from her head and a scorching on her scalp that flung her backward. As she toppled off the edge of the terrace, she cocked and fired again blindly, and as she crashed into the thicket of mesquite that thinly edged the terrace, she was rewarded with a cry of pain from above—then her head smacked against the stony ground and she lost consciousness.

By the time she regained it, her doctor had already bandaged her head and was scrupulously removing the spines of the cactus she had encountered in her fall. The sheriff was already there and Twyla was gone in an ambulance, leaving behind far more blood than Clarise would have thought would come from what they described as a flesh wound.

By the time the authorities departed, after praising Kent for his timely return and first-aid skill and marveling at Clarise's marksmanship, it was late in the afternoon. It was later still—after the fragments of pot had been swept away and the terrace washed free of blood and they had taken a little food—that they finally had calmed themselves.

Clarise tried not to be annoyed with her husband's obvious pleasure in being fought over by two such dedicated combatants. He was over seventy, after all. He kept taking her hand and patting it. "I still don't understand," he said wonderingly, "how a woman like that could let herself go over the edge."

"Blind inflexibility," Clarise said crossly. "She was that way at bridge. Twyla would never lead away from a king. If God dealt her four kings, I suppose she'd lead the unsupported king itself.

"She thought she knew what she wanted and went after it. The amazing part was that it was you. The rest of it was nonsense. Altruistic and selfless she wasn't."

She drew a deep breath, managing not to cough. She lit a cigarette

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for herself. "The arrogance of the woman," she said. "The presumption. She was too tall for you, anyway."

She settled herself into her favorite chair, which fortunately had suffered little damage, and let her gaze roam over the terrace and down to the lake, which was layered with silver in the afternoon sun. A few small black birds still hopped about on the rock.

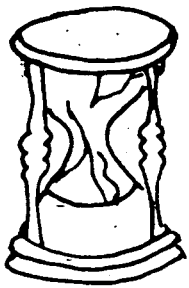
"The cow birds are still there. How lovely and greedy they are."

She paused.

" 'Silly' I meant to say."

Her husband nodded and went to fix her a salty dog.

The light fell everywhere over the water and over the rocks, turning golden, shimmering, softening the harshness of rock and sand and mesquite. How splendid and interesting it all was.



DETECTIVERSE

LETTING THEM HAVE IT

by MARK GRENIER

Said a gun-wielding robber named Steve:
"When there's silver or gold, then I thieve,
But, when dealing in lead,
My opinion instead
Is it's better to give than receive."

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a *NEW* Jeffery Rand story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

"She's my wife, you know," Rand said.

Seymour looked up, meeting his eyes. "She is now. Back then, she was in the pay of the Russians."

THE SPY WHO LOOKED BACK

by EDWARD D. HOCH

Hastings peered at his desk, avoiding Rand's eyes, and said, "This is most difficult for me. It seems we've uncovered some old documents which indicate your wife Leila was a Russian agent during her years in Egypt."

"That's impossible," Rand replied, thinking at first it was some sort of joke.

"It's no game," Hastings answered grimly. "When the Russians pulled out of Egypt in the early seventies they left behind a great many records of their operations in that country. Most were in the hands of paymasters and network chiefs who remained in place, often in deep cover. We flushed one of them out just last week, and he had coded pay records dating back to the nineteen sixties. Leila Gaad was listed as an agent. We checked the address to make certain it was your Leila."

"Someone's trying to embarrass me," Rand said. It was almost a decade since he'd retired as head of Concealed Communications, but he'd made a good many enemies in his time, not always on the other side.

Hastings tried to be as gentle as possible. "Look here, Jeffery, the documents date from nineteen sixty-nine and nineteen seventy. That was a full year before you met Leila. How could anyone have placed her name on this list to embarrass you before you'd even met her?"

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"Documents can be faked."

Hastings was silent for a moment. Then he said, "I think you should meet with our Mr. Seymour. He's the one who made the discovery."

Rand was escorted to a conference room down the hall from where his old office had been. Security was tighter now than in his day, with an elaborate system of individual door locks, each of which needed both a code number for the push buttons and a magnetized card for the slot.

Henry Seymour was a cool and efficient young man with all the personality of a robot. He ran through the captured records with the detachment of a slightly bored professor. "You'll note the name Leila Gaad appears four times on the pay records for nineteen sixty-nine and nineteen seventy, indicating quarterly payments of a substantial sum of money. There are also two payments in the first half of nineteen-seventy-one. Then they ceased."

"That's when she met me," Rand said. "She's my wife, you know."

Seymour looked up, meeting Rand's eyes. "She is now. Back then, she was in the pay of the Russians."

Rand tried to remain calm. "I find that difficult to believe. She helped me on assignments in Egypt and later in Moscow. She even performed a valuable service for us in the United States once. And she herself was kidnaped by terrorists a few years back."

"She's Egyptian, isn't she?"

"Her mother was British. She's a British citizen and my wife. Tell me more about the documents you claim implicate her."

Henry Seymour hesitated only an instant. He mumbled something about current security clearance, but apparently decided that Hastings meant for Rand to see everything. "Very well. As you must know, Russian-Egyptian relations were very close during the period in question. The Russians maintained troops and advisors in Egypt until they were finally expelled by Sadat in nineteen seventy-two. Needless to say, there were Russian agents on Egyptian soil all during the period, and they remained when the military personnel pulled out. One group of agents, the Muski Network, named after an area near Cairo's Old City, was made up of Cairo residents, many with government or university ties. I believe your wife was an archaeologist at Cairo University."

"Yes, but she was hardly in a position to supply the Russians with any useful information. It's only in old films that the enemy hides caches of weapons in ancient tombs."

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Seymour produced a large ledger book for the years 1968 to 1972. "The paymaster's name was Fritz Broker. This was his book."

"What happened to him?"

The young man raised his eyebrows. "He was murdered in Cairo last week. I thought Hastings told you."

"Not that part, no."

"Our men had been watching him for some time, and we managed to get to his house before the police. We found this metal box containing old coded pay records. The code was a simple substitution cipher, easy enough to crack." He opened the book to the pages covering the Muski Network.

"What's this seventeen at the top of the page?"

"Broker was most considerate. That's the cipher key. Each letter is replaced by one seventeen places ahead of it in the alphabet, starting over when you reach Z. Thus in your wife's name, *Leila Gaad*, the *L* in plaintext becomes *C* in the cipher, *E* becomes *V*, and so on. Her name reads *Cvzcrxrru* with the space left out."

"He wrote the number on the same page as the cipher?"

Henry Seymour nodded. "I don't suppose he thought anyone but himself would ever see it, but he must have been following Moscow's instructions to encipher all names."

"What else was in the metal box?"

Seymour lifted the cover. "Look for yourself."

Rand found batches of unused checks imprinted with a cover name, a couple of Cairo phonebooks for 1969 and 1971, an airline schedule for flights between Cairo and Moscow, and a street map of the Egyptian city. "I suppose you've been over these for pinpricks or invisible ink."

"Of course. There's nothing."

"What happened after mid-seventy-one?"

Seymour produced a second coded list. "Five of the eleven agents were replaced by others. Your wife's name was replaced by that of Kenneth Fyles. He still lives in Cairo and is something of a businessman. He deals mainly in livestock."

"An odd choice for a Russian agent."

"The others are odd, too," Seymour admitted, "but these records are authentic. The ink and the paper were all tested for age."

"How many are still in Cairo?"

"Of the eleven on the original list, only one is still there, though we've traced some who moved away, like your wife. But one of the five replacements—Fyles—is still there, too. This is fifteen years

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later, remember, and Cairo has changed a great deal. Here are the addresses of the two still in Cairo."

"I'll have to speak to Leila about this," Rand said.

"I understand," Seymour replied without much sympathy. "Our government may not take action against her, since she was spying on the Egyptians and not the British."

Rand glared at him. "Were there no current lists in that box?"

"We believe Broker was recently replaced as paymaster. The Russians may have taken back the more current records."

That evening, Leila, curled up on the sofa, listened to Rand's story in silence. When he had finished she asked, "Do you believe it, Jeffery?"

"Of course not. What I want to find out is how your name got to be on the list." Thirteen years after he'd met her in Cairo, Leila was still a lovely woman, small and dark-haired. At thirty-eight she still seemed like twenty-five, and by not growing old herself she'd managed to keep him young as well. The years since his retirement had been busy ones, filled with writing, speaking engagements, and occasional government assignments. Leila taught a course in archaeology at nearby Reading University.

"The Russians faked it, I suppose," she told him.

"That was my first thought, but the lists date from fifteen years ago, before we met."

"Documents can be altered. You once told me how skillful the KGB is at it."

"I should go there," he decided.

"To Moscow?"

"No, to Cairo. To find the truth."

"I thought you knew the truth."

"About you I do," he said. "But I must get to the bottom of this."

He could see she was unhappy. "I won't come with you," she told him.

"You don't have to," he said quietly. "I'd rather you didn't."

"How much were they paying me?"

"Three thousand pounds four times a year." It would have been a great deal of money in Cairo fifteen years ago. He took a slip of paper from his pocket. "Did you ever hear the name Kenneth Fyles?"

"No."

"He's the man who's supposed to have replaced you in the network.

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He's still living there, and so is one other—" he read the name from the paper "—Sayid Mahfouz."

"I don't know either of them."

"How about Fritz Broker, the man who's supposed to have paid you?"

"These names mean nothing to me, Jeffery."

"I know it." He reached for her hand. "I just have to ask you for the record."

The airport at Cairo was in a frenzy when his plane landed late the following afternoon. There had been a bomb scare on one of the departing jetliners, a reminder that tensions were never completely absent in the Middle East. The day was hot and humid, with the familiar dusty air hanging over the city like a mist. Rand had told Hastings he was making the journey and there had been no objection. In fact, Hastings seemed pleased by his decision and had sent Henry Seymour along to accompany him, saying, "He was due for a courier run next week—I'll send him a few days early."

Rand had no intention of being saddled with the young code expert for the length of his brief stay, but that proved to be no problem.

"I'll be staying at the embassy," Seymour told Rand as they left the airport together. "Do you want to put up there, too?"

"Thanks, but I've booked a room at the Nile Hilton. I want this trip to be as unofficial as possible."

"What do you hope to discover? Evidence of your wife's innocence?"

"I don't need that. I just want to know who's behind this attempt to frame her."

"If anyone framed her, it was Fritz Broker, fifteen years ago. And he's dead now."

"Then I intend to find his killer," Rand said.

That was easier said than done. Reading the reports on Fritz Broker's murder a week earlier, Rand could find nothing unusual. Broker, a German tank commander during World War II, had settled in Egypt following his release from a prison camp at the end of the war. He'd been a loyal German fighting with Rommel's Afrika Korps and there was no hint in the official records that he'd gone over to the Russians at any time in the late 1960s. Yet Seymour had told Rand they'd been watching him for some time. Broker had been stabbed to death and robbed on a dark street near his home. It seemed like a common enough crime, the sort that might have hap-

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pened to a middle-aged man in any large city. Or someone back in London had ordered his death. Rand knew such things had happened in the past.

At the time of his death, Broker was on his way home from a weekly card game at the Nile Veterans' Club. It seemed the most likely place for Rand to begin.

The club's manager was a Frenchman named Futrille, a mustached man with slick black hair who seemed willing to cooperate. "We welcome all veterans here," he explained, "and there are a number of Germans and English as well as Egyptians who fought in the Six Day War against Israel. Did you know Cairo's population swelled to six million people during and after that war? I opened our clubrooms as an emergency food station."

"Did you know Fritz Broker that long ago?"

"Yes, off and on. He was a member of the club, but he didn't start coming here regularly until a few years ago."

"Regularly?"

Futrille allowed himself a slight smile. "I went over all this with the police last week."

"I'm sorry to trouble you again, but it involves an insurance matter. They sent me out from London to make a few routine inquiries."

The Frenchman seemed to accept the story. Someone had once told Rand at a party that he looked like an insurance adjuster and perhaps it was true. "In any case," Futrille said, "Fritz was a regular at our Thursday-night card games. The stakes were sometimes high but he never won or lost a great deal. The night he was killed he lost about fifteen pounds sterling."

"Did anyone leave the game around the same time he did?"

Futrille shook his head. "It was a slow night and I sat in on the game as banker. There were four other players, and none of us left the table for the next two hours. As I told the police, there's no possibility any of them could have killed him. I understand he was stabbed about a half hour after he left here."

"That's correct," Rand said. "One more question. Would either of these men be members here?" He showed Futrille his notebook with the names Fyles and Mahfouz in it.

"No, I do not know them."

"Thanks for your help."

"Are you a veteran yourself, Mr. Rand?"

"I put in several years of government service."

"Then you would be welcome at our Thursday-night gatherings."

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"What's the game?"

"On Thursdays the game is always baccarat."

"Thank you," Rand said. "I'll remember that."

The city had always impressed Rand with its blend of old and new, and after an absence of several years he still found it fascinating that one could see the ancient pyramids from the modern revolving restaurant atop the Cairo Tower. He dined there alone on his first evening, remembering the times he'd shared the view with Leila. He was pleased to be alone because it gave him an opportunity to sort out his thoughts about her. There was a question he had to ask himself, one he'd been avoiding ever since the meeting with Hastings. If the evidence finally proved that Leila had once worked for the Russians, would it make any difference? Would he love her any less?

He found a telephone in the restaurant and called the first of the two names on his list. No one answered at Kenneth Fyles' home, so he tried the second name. A woman with a thick accent answered and informed him that Sayid Mahfouz would return in an hour. Rand thanked her and hung up.

Since he had an hour to kill, he took a taxi to the first address. It was in a newer section of the city, away from the crowded streets, where high-rise apartments and single-family residences had an air of westernized culture. Rand knew that many Europeans and Americans lived there and he wasn't surprised when Kenneth Fyles' house proved to be one of the nicest. A westerner didn't remain in Cairo for fifteen years or more unless it was profitable.

Rand saw a young man at the partly opened door, but couldn't tell if he was arriving or leaving. "Is Kenneth Fyles at home?" he asked as he approached.

"I don't know. The door is open so he is probably inside."

"My name is Rand. I'm here to see him on business."

"Camels?"

"What?"

"Kenneth is a camel dealer. But you must know that. I'm Rod Vincent, a friend of his."

They entered the house together, and Rand caught a faint odor of incense in the air. There were obviously expensive modern paintings on the walls and Rand decided the camel business must be very profitable indeed.

"My God!" Rod Vincent gasped.

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Rand followed him into a small study off the living room. A grey-haired man was lying behind the desk with a dagger in his chest. The young man had dropped to his knees beside him. "Is it Fyles?" Rand asked.

"Who would do a thing like this?" Vincent gasped, close to tears. "Kenneth never hurt a soul."

"I'll call the police," Rand said.

While they waited, Vincent managed to compose himself. In the living room, he lit a cigarette. "We were friends a long time," he told Rand.

"Who were his other friends? Any Europeans? Russians?"

The young man misconstrued the question. "He had no one but me! I was planning to move in here with him next month!"

"How about a German named Fritz Broker? Did Kenneth ever mention him?"

"No. *I* never heard the name before."

A police car pulled up in front of the house and Rand went outside to meet them.

It was dark by the time he'd given his vague answers to the official questions and made his escape. The police seemed more interested in Rod Vincent and when Rand mentioned contacts at the British embassy they were willing to let him go. He was tired, and anxious to return to his hotel room, but he had one more stop to make. It had become very important to visit the other name on the list, Sayid Mahfouz.

Mahfouz lived in the Old City, a section of shops and narrow streets where Europeans rarely ventured after dark. When Rand reached the address—a shabby four-story apartment building—he felt a chill when he saw a police car parked in front. Two officers were just leaving. Rand stopped one of them. "I'm looking for Sayid Mahfouz."

"You come too late. He was killed by a robber a block from home."

"Tonight?"

"About two hours ago."

"Did you catch the killer?"

The officer shrugged. "Not yet. We are looking."

"How was he killed?"

"With a knife."

"Is his family upstairs?"

"A wife, two children, an aged mother."

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The police left and Rand climbed the steps. It was the wife who answered the door. She was a woman around forty, and in the dim light of the landing she looked a bit like Leila. "We are in mourning here," she told him. "My husband has been killed."

"I know, and I offer my deepest sympathy. I didn't know Sayid, but I was on my way to meet him tonight."

"What about?" They stood on the dim landing. A soft wailing came from inside and Rand began to have misgivings about intruding on the family's grief.

"A business matter."

"About the shop?" she said.

"Not directly. What shop is that?"

"Sayid sold plastic sandals he made in a workshop a few blocks from here. He was killed on the way home." Her voice was low, perhaps so the others would not hear. "I have nothing now."

"You have your children."

"Yes." She started to turn away.

"I came about Fritz Broker."

"Who?" she asked, genuinely puzzled.

"Your husband may have known him. A long time ago your husband may have gotten money from a man named Fritz Broker."

"Sayid never got money from anyone. He had to slave for every penny he earned."

It sounded like the truth, and yet her husband was dead like the others. "I'm sorry to have bothered you," Rand told her. "What's your name?"

"Mustafa."

Rand pressed some money into her hand. "Buy something for the children, Mustafa."

Seymour was waiting for him at the embassy in the morning. "You were at the scene of a homosexual killing last night," he said accusingly. "Your name is in the police report."

"What are you talking about?"

"A camel dealer named Fyles was stabbed to death by his boy friend."

"The police are holding Vincent?"

"That's right. Is this the same Fyles whose name was on Broker's list of agents?"

"Of course. In case you haven't heard it yet, the other man on the list, Sayid Mahfouz, was killed last night, too."

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There was just a flicker of surprise on Henry Seymour's face. "Killed by the same person who killed Broker?"

"Perhaps."

"Then everyone from the network still in Cairo is dead. Will they go after the others as well?"

"What others?" Rand asked.

"Your wife, for one. Her name was on that list."

It hadn't occurred to Rand that Leila might be in danger back in England. "I'll have to phone her," he said.

"Use this line. I'll be back in a few minutes."

It took Rand only moments to get through to Leila. The sound of her voice refreshed him at once. "I'm still in Cairo," he said. "How are you?"

"Fine," she answered. "What have you found?"

"There have been more killings," he said. "Seymour believes you may be in danger."

"Why me?"

"Someone seems to be killing off all the members of the old network."

"But don't you see, I'm *not* a member, Jeffery. I never *was* a member. There's no danger to me."

"I just want you to be careful. You know where my pistol is. Get it and keep it near you. Use it if you have to. If you see anything suspicious at all, phone Hastings. Tell him you need a bodyguard."

"Don't worry."

"I love you."

"Hurry back."

As Rand hung up the telephone, Henry Seymour returned to the office. Rand wondered if he'd been listening on an extension. "Is she all right?" Seymour asked.

"So far."

"I'm glad she was there," Seymour said.

"What? Where else would she be?"

"Well, we have to consider all the possibilities. You must understand that. If she was a former agent, she might have followed you here to eliminate those people who knew her."

Rand's anger boiled over. "That's ridiculous! Is that your job, to come up with preposterous theories?"

"I don't know her. I'm not married to her. She's just a name to me. A name on a list with ten others."

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"Do you have a name—one name—that you're sure of?" Rand asked him. "That you *know* was a Russian agent?"

"Fritz Broker wasn't paying them for his health."

"Maybe he was making up names and pocketing the money. It's happened before."

"But not for this long a period. The network was supplying the Russians with information—it had to come from somewhere!"

"You think Fyles and Mahfouz were agents?"

Seymour looked at him. "They're dead, aren't they?"

By day the Old City didn't seem quite so threatening. The little shops were open and the narrow streets were crowded with tourists and residents of the ancient buildings. Rand went first to the shop where Sayid Mahfouz had sold his plastic sandals. It was closed, as he'd expected it would be, but he was more interested in something else. He walked around to the rear of the building and stared up at the place where a single telephone line ran to a nearby pole.

"You came back," a voice behind him said. He turned and saw it was Mustafa, the dead man's wife. By the stark light of day she no longer resembled Leila.

"I was only passing by," he said.

"We are preparing for the funeral. I had to get something from the shop. But why were you staring at the sky?"

"Not the sky," Jeffery said, "that telephone line. I saw the listing in the book, but I wanted to make sure he had one."

"But of course—he needed it at the shop."

"In a city where the telephone service has been notoriously bad for years, many in the Old City don't bother with the expense of a phone. But your husband had two listed—at your apartment and here."

"This one is recent, but he always had one at home."

"He had it fifteen years ago?"

"Yes, for his business."

Rand nodded. "Thank you, Mrs. Mahfouz."

He found a nearby phone and called the embassy. They told him Seymour had gone to the Nile Veterans' Club for lunch. Rand found him there, not in the dining room but alone at the billiard table, practicing some shots. "Well! Good to see you, Rand!"

"I didn't know you were a Nile Veteran. You were too young to have fought in World War II, surely."

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Henry Seymour smiled and put down his cue. "I flew a jet for Israel in 'sixty-seven. Didn't I mention that?"

"I suppose there's a great deal about yourself you haven't mentioned. You must be older than you appear."

"Were you looking for me?"

"Yes," Rand said. "We parted this morning with an unanswered question—if Fyles and Mahfouz weren't agents, why are they dead? I can answer that question now."

Seymour frowned. "What do you mean? Do you know something?"

"I think so. Fritz Broker's mysterious box contained what one might expect, plus two Cairo phonebooks for the years of the network. Why phonebooks? Surely the phone numbers of his agents could be kept in something less bulky. Then I remembered that substitution cipher in which the plaintext letters were encoded by the seventeenth letter ahead of them in the alphabet. Why not a double cipher, with the real agent's name replaced by the name seventeen lines ahead of it in the Cairo phonebook?"

Henry Seymour reached beneath his suitcoat. "I see what you mean."

"Leila's name wasn't replaced in mid-'seventy-one because she met me. It was replaced because the telephone company issued a new phonebook, and with the population increase the seventeenth name after the true agent became Fyles instead of Gaad."

Seymour's hand came out of his coat holding a small automatic. He fired without blinking and Rand could feel the breeze from the bullet as it passed.

Then there was a second shot behind him and he turned to see the Frenchman, Futrille, with his gun aimed at the floor. He staggered back against the door, bleeding from a wound in his side.

"I believe he was about to shoot you," Henry Seymour told Rand.

Leila was waiting at Heathrow when the plane from Cairo landed the following morning. "Hastings phoned to tell me what happened," she said. "Are you all right?"

"Just barely. I don't much care for the fellow Seymour, but he saved my life."

"And I'm no longer listed as a Russian agent?"

"That's all over," he told her as they walked to the car. "Broker had hidden the real names of the agents he was paying by substituting the name that came seventeen lines later in the Cairo phonebook. Then he enciphered the false names to add to the security. It

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was only a stroke of bad luck that your name was used in place of Futrille's for a couple of years."

"Who is this Futrille?"

"The manager of a veterans' club in Cairo. It was the perfect position for an enemy agent to learn all sorts of military gossip, and he put it to good use for many years. But then Fritz Broker was killed, probably by a mugger who happened to see him leave the club, and British Intelligence recovered his pay records. Futrille and the other network members must have been in a panic. But when I asked about Fyles and Mahfouz, Futrille knew we hadn't yet tumbled to the real names. He killed those two innocent men simply to strengthen the illusion that they were the Russian agents. If we thought they'd been killed before they could talk, this business with the seventeenth name would never occur to us."

"How did you know it was Futrille?"

"Those two were killed by someone who knew we were checking on them. Seymour and I had spoken to very few people, and when I thought about Fyles' name coming right before Gaad in the phonebook, I knew without looking that Futrille would come about seventeen names earlier. Seymour was at the veterans' club when I told him about it, and of course Futrille had listening devices all over the place to pick up information. He heard me, and tried to kill us both. Luckily, Seymour is fast with a gun."

"And the rest of the network?"

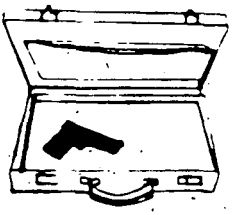
"They're picking them out of the phonebook. It's up to the Egyptian authorities from here on."

"Broker's death was a mere happenstance?"

"Yes, like your name turning up on that list."

Suddenly Leila stopped. She looked at Rand lovingly, her face serious. "If we'd never met," she said.

"I know," he said and kissed her. "I feel the same way."



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"You must have been raised in a barn," Jennifer's mother reprimanded John, "never asking her to sit down, never asking her name, leaving her to show herself out. If it'd been me, I'd have broken up the showroom . . ."

THE FINE ART OF REVENGE

by SUSAN DODSON

Mr. Karl,

I thought you should know that because of your rudeness while looking at my poor daughter Jennifer's portfolio last Wednesday, she tried to commit suicide. I'm sure an important man like you doesn't care about the artists' lives, but it was after seeing you that she did it. Took the pills, I mean. I don't think it's fair. The least you could have done was be polite. She says you never asked her to sit down. She was the short one with the big grey eyes. Why do you hurt people so much?

All the worst to you, too,

Mrs. Barbara Ridley

John Karl read the letter again. The short one with the big grey eyes? There were always so many. He wiped his brow with a sweaty hand, making it wetter than before. They came in every day with their portfolios and their high hopes. Wednesday? Ah, when both his assistants were out calling on buyers, damn it. Otherwise he wouldn't have been the one not to ask the girl to sit down. But why ask her to sit down? She'd just have to get up again.

The offices of Karl International, Inc., world's largest publishers and distributors of prints, overlooked Fifth Avenue and was a place John Karl had planned for years. From a dingy, off-the-street print shop on Tenth Avenue and Fortieth Street to this swank suite had been a hard trip. He looked at the paperwork piled high on the teak desk and couldn't calculate how late he might have to stay. It was already after seven and his stomach was wanting dinner.

The big grey eyes on Wednesday of last week. Today was Friday,

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more than a week later, so the girl must have lived. The mother had said tried, hadn't she? Yes, the note said tried.

A muffled chime from a church nearby signaled eight before John Karl finally pushed himself wearily up from his chair and walked across the plush carpet, not wanting to do what he knew he would. Leaving the bare white walls of his office to pass through the huge showroom filled with awful prints was becoming a chore, too. His office was a sanctuary that had almost been spoiled only once by an eager secretary who loved the mass-produced kitsch the company bought. She'd thought it a shame he neglected his office so, and one morning she'd come in early and hung owls, pussycats, butterflies, and drippy, dopey flowers everywhere. None of his recent employees had seen him lose his temper before, because the move from Tenth to Fifth had polished his manners, but that morning he'd shown the Hell's Kitchen fury—and the gun left over from protecting his property there. It had been a stupid thing to do, but he still enjoyed remembering the secretary's panic as he'd waved the gun in her face and told her to get out.

At the receptionist's desk in the outer office, Karl turned the pages of the large appointment book to Wednesday of the previous week. Too bad, she was there. Jennifer Ridley, 432 West Twentieth Street. And the phone number. He reached for the receptionist's phone and sighed.

It was an old brownstone. He approached it the way he might approach an appointment with a terrorist. (And there were a few in the art world. Those who thought what he did a sacrilege, for instance. As if it was any of their business how he made his millions.)

The dozen roses he had brought with him seemed as overblown as the air-brushed roses back in the showroom. So did his guilt. A suicide attempt, though.

Mrs. Ridley looked as if she'd been called away from milking cows or tending the field. A drab, shapeless dress and dark hair pulled tightly away from a kind of pretty face made her look older, but surely, Karl thought, she couldn't have seen fifty yet.

"Well, if it isn't the great man himself. I thought when you called last night you might have been a crank, but I saw your picture in *People* magazine one time, at a charity ball or something." She leaned against the half open door. "You weren't too charitable to my daughter, were you?"

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Her loudly resonant voice offended John Karl. "I'd like to speak to your daughter for a moment, if I may."

She observed the roses sourly. "First you make her feel so bad she tries to take herself off and then you come around pleasant as a picture." But she stepped aside grudgingly, admitting him into a tiny, hot two-room apartment. A bit of sun from one window shed light on a couch and two wilting chairs. A wall kitchen faded back into dimness behind a small dining table with one stool. The place reminded Karl too much of his first apartment in New York.

Watching him, Mrs. Ridley said bitingly, "It ain't the Ritz, is it?"

"Do you live here with your daughter?"

"No, I don't. I had to come from Ohio to be with her."

"I'm sorry," John murmured. "Really. Now may I please see your daughter?"

She stared at him resentfully for a while longer, then led the way to a door at the left.

The girl was indeed short, and her eyes were big but not exactly grey. More of a sea-green. At least they shimmered like the sea.

For a moment John wondered why her looks hadn't impressed him more, but when he saw some of her paintings hanging brightly on the walls he understood. They were huge, with monstrous flowers—great busy things with washes of pure color. And she'd worn an equally loud dress that day—its clashing tones had irritated him. Now her face against the white pillows showed her delicate features and a frailness that was very becoming.

"My dear, I'm very sorry I hurt you," John said. "It isn't that your work is bad, believe me. It's very good, actually. It's just that my customers have such appalling taste." He was now beside the bed. He tried a smile. In a face as plain as his, the perfect teeth of a kindly smile usually melted hearts. "Please forgive me and accept these as an apology."

She reached out tentatively, and he thought he was home free—another few minutes and he'd be out of there—then her hand fell back to cover her damp eyes and she turned her head away.

"She says you didn't give her a chance." Mrs. Ridley stood by a battered drawing table whose top needed realignment. "She says you only looked at the first one and told her it wouldn't do."

"That's true," John said. "I can tell right away what my customers—"

"Don't bother with the rest. You must have been raised in a barn,

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never asking her to sit down, never asking her name, leaving her to show herself out. If it'd been me I'd have broken up the showroom."

The back of John's neck was stuck to his collar and he had to escape. Setting the roses carefully on the bed, he said, "Please come back to see me on Monday. We'll have a real visit and I'll take—" he looked wildly at the walls "—the orchids. And I'll take the birds of paradise. And I'll look at anything else you have to show me."

Jennifer took her hand from her eyes and looked at him mournfully.

"Monday, then?" he coaxed.

She nodded, ever so slightly.

"I think it went well, don't you?" Mrs. Ridley said triumphantly.

"Huh." Jennifer kicked aside the covers, landed on the floor, and reached for a summery robe. As she walked through to the living room, she mimicked John Karl. "I'll take the orchids. And I'll take the birds— I'll give *him* the bird by the time I'm through."

"Well, what do you want? Don't forget that if I hadn't done so well with what you told me—"

Jennifer's eyes narrowed. "Drop the motherly tone. Next thing you know you'll be telling me to clean up my room." She went to a small table near the door, opened and reached into a drawer, and came up with a roll of bills. "Here's your two hundred. Thanks a lot, and forget we ever met."

The older woman took the bills. "Sure. Call me if you ever need a Mom again. The number'll be the same, but I might change my name again. Barbara Belair is getting on my nerves."

"Just don't use Ridley," Jennifer told her.

It was a surprise to John Karl when Jennifer's birds of paradise, entitled "Carnival," began to sell. When the orchids, too, became successful a Jennifer Ridley print became "trendy" and John asked her out to dinner, confessing, "Exotic flowers and birds seem to be popular right now, dear. I need many, many more."

Working closely with Jennifer in the days that followed brought him pleasure. She flattered him and made him feel more attractive than he'd ever felt in his life. By the time he married her some three months later, his anxiety attacks were gone. Fifty didn't seem old any more, just mature.

After their honeymoon tour of European museums, Jennifer began to change her style—not her style of dress (to John's chagrin it was

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still too flashy) but her style of painting. It was softer, the colors more subtle, the effect less crowded. And gradually they were populated with more people until finally the flowers were only background.

They had settled into John's sumptuous Central Park South condominium and one morning he put down the painting that Jennifer had stayed up all night to finish and said, "But, dear, these new paintings of yours won't sell."

"How do you know that?" Jennifer asked sweetly. "After all, you've said that before."

"Haven't I lived that down?" John looked at her reprovingly. "Of course, I'll try one or two."

They sold. Fans of Jennifer Ridley approved the new look.

John Karl was happier than he'd ever been in his life. He didn't care about the money Jennifer lavished on herself and he loved the parties they became famous for. Society now accepted him because of his beautiful Jennifer, her flashy clothes and flashier parties.

The new prints sold so well that when Jennifer changed her style again, he was almost angry. "Oh, darling, surrealism doesn't sell at all. And I'm afraid these are rather—ugly."

"But of course they are! Don't you see? I'm trying to express just that—the primal evil that exists in modern man!" Jennifer traced a finger across the fiendishly rendered face of a bus driver. In the background, his passengers were falling in the aisles, twisted and bloody. She wheedled, "Oh, John, just try one or two."

But they weren't successful. John had been right this time. So Jennifer found yet another style.

John examined them in disgust. "Animals? And more blood than before? Perhaps you're overworking, Jennifer." He was about to suggest she take some Valium, then remembered that pills had once been too much of a good thing with her and that she still refused to throw away the half bottle left from her suicide attempt. "Let's take a vacation," he suggested. She pushed him away.

Jennifer persisted. One evening she was hard at work, but the color of the blood gushing out of the gazelle lacked the freshness of being newly spilled. "Oh, John," she said, exasperated, when he knocked on the door of her workroom. "Go on to the stupid play without me. I'm sure I won't be missed."

The next morning when they were at breakfast, John checked the

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newspaper to see if he was listed among the crowd at the opening. When he saw he wasn't, he set the paper aside and said, "Jennifer, the strangest thing. In the play last night there was an actress who looked exactly like your late mother."

"What?" Jennifer had been eyeing the ketchup bottle, brooding over the perfect formula of red to intrude in the cracks of the cheetah's teeth. "I'm sorry, darling, what did you say?"

When John repeated himself, Jennifer's eyes turned sad. "You know what they say—everyone has a double somewhere. Poor Mom—she was always such a terrible driver."

"I'm sorry, dear. I didn't mean to upset you. I don't know why I mentioned it. She probably doesn't look at all like your mother close up." He reached for his coffee and changed the subject. "When I get back from Boston next week we'll talk more about that vacation. I know you don't like the idea, but we both need a break from work."

As soon as he left for the office, Jennifer snatched up the paper. The stupid woman hadn't changed her name, after all. It jumped out at her. "Barbara Belair was brilliant last night as the deranged sister. It's wonderful to see someone who has struggled for years make the kind of breakthrough she did last night in *Fortune's Folly*."

Jennifer flung the newspaper across the room and concentrated her attention on the ketchup bottle.

The morning mail was neatly stacked on John's desk. Jennifer found the envelope right away. After putting it on top of the pile, she took his gun from the middle drawer and hid it deep in her huge purple shoulder bag.

Barbara Belair opened the door of her apartment. "Did the letter get there?"

"Yes!" Jennifer held up a pint of Hennessy and hurried past Barbara. "We have time to celebrate before he arrives."

Barbara followed her into the kitchen. "What makes you think he's going to want a divorce just because you lied to him about me?" She watched Jennifer find brandy snifters and pour two healthy shots. "I'm not sure I want any. I have to get through this scene with him and then get to my matinee."

"Oh, just one." Jennifer checked her watch. "You did say twelve-thirty in the letter?"

"I said exactly what you told me to say. Did you bring the money?"

"Of course, silly. Five thousand now and five more when the di-

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vorce goes through. And to answer your question, John hates being lied to. Come on, no use standing around here—let's go into the living room and have a civilized celebration."

"Huh?" Barbara said, but found herself following Jennifer into the living room.

Jennifer's red dress slashed across the white couch as she arranged herself, then raised her glass in a cerise-gloved hand to Barbara. "Cheers," she said. After taking a small sip of the cognac she put the glass down on the coffee table.

"What's with the gloves?" Barbara asked, wishing she was too secure to need the money to be here. "Isn't it too warm?"

Jennifer studied her gloves dully. "These?" Then, abruptly, she pulled back the top of one and showed a little bit of white. "I need them to cover up the bandages."

"Oh!" Barbara's eyes popped.

"When I tried to leave him, he said he wouldn't give me a divorce. I really felt apart." The rush of words was followed by a sigh. "He's really not a very nice man, Barbara."

"I could have told you that." Barbara leaned forward. "I hope you've learned a lesson, Jennifer. You can't get anywhere in the arts without paying your dues."

"Yes, well, if I hadn't, you wouldn't be coming into your five thou," Jennifer reminded her. She raised her glass again. "Here's to a better life. By the way, I saw your review—congratulations."

"Thanks." Barbara accepted the toast and swallowed the last of her cognac. "Nothing can stop me now. This play will be on Broadway forever, but I may go out to California. There's a part—" She yawned. "Sorry. Sleepy . . ." Her head lolled, perked, and lolled again.

Jennifer picked up both snifters, washed them in the kitchen, put one back on the shelf, and took another Hennessy bottle out of her shoulder bag. With the first safely tucked away back in her shoulder bag, she poured some of the pure cognac down the drain and some into the remaining snifter. A quick run of water and she was back in the living room well before the doorbell rang.

"Jennifer! What are you doing here?" John looked over her shoulder and saw Barbara slumped in the chair. "My God, it *is* your mother! But what's the matter with her?" He hurried inside and over to the chair.

"I didn't want to tell you." Jennifer checked the sidewalk, then shut the door, crossed to the couch, and picked up her purse. "She

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didn't really die in a car accident but I was too ashamed to admit she's an alcoholic."

"My dear." John turned to face her and saw the gun, but she fired before he could say anything else. It made only a small noise—not much more than a minor backfire from the street. Still, Jennifer hurried.

Barbara moved in her sleep but didn't waken as Jennifer concentrated on placing the gun in her hand. When it was exactly right, she lifted the hand to Barbara's temple, fired, and let it drop. The gun bounced and nestled into the rug. At the door, Jennifer turned and surveyed the scene with satisfaction.

The hall of the old apartment building was empty. As she went down the outside stairs, she thought about her paintings. Strange. Her surrealism had been more grotesque than real life, after all. As for the blood, well, a touch of magenta was what was missing.

MURDER SUICIDE were the headlines that very day. Sub-headlines read, "Famous Art Mogul Killed by Actress Who Shoots Self." A photo of the note on Barbara Belair's stationery was enlarged: Dear John, We must talk. It's about Jennifer. Come to my apartment at twelve-thirty on the day you receive this letter.

The papers played up the Dear John killing for days, especially the fact that the actress had fortified herself with cognac and Valium. They quoted the bereaved widow as saying, "It's my fault. I was so wrapped up in my work I didn't notice how we'd grown apart."

Jennifer looked appropriately tragic in black as she gave out interviews here and there, milking the publicity for all it was worth. She was disappointed that no publishers were interested in a story of her life but thrilled when *Art World* ran a full-length article featuring several of her paintings.

When prints of "Carnival" topped the ten-million mark, she wanted to return to her old style, but because of the pressing needs of the company she decided to redecorate first.

Not a trace of John Karl was left when she moved into his old office. The heavy teak furniture had been hauled away and light bright furniture hauled in. Pots of orchids and other blooming plants were installed and the originals of her paintings were hung on the walls. An adjoining office was commandeered and equipped as a studio. After both were soundproofed to keep noise out, allowing her to concentrate, the atmosphere was so pleasant that she used the offices constantly and left the showroom to her employees . . .

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One lovely fall day, when both of her assistants were out calling on buyers, Jennifer stood in her office impatiently looking at the first painting in a young man's portfolio. "This won't do for us," she told him. "Can you see your own way out? I'm terribly busy."

The young man slowly folded the huge, worn cardboards together and painstakingly tied the strings. Jennifer didn't notice how thin he was or the bitter look on his face as she returned to her desk and stood waiting for him to leave.

But instead of picking up his portfolio, he said, "You don't remember me, do you? We were in a class together at the Art Students League."

"Of course I do." Jennifer smirked with the superiority of success. "You were weird then, and you're weirder now. How can you expect to sell scenes of derelicts and bag ladies?"

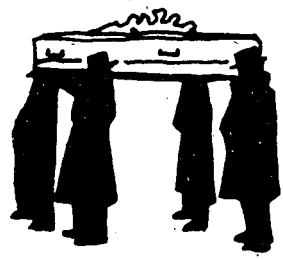
"And you were always a conceited little viper," he retorted. "Always thinking your work was better than anyone else's."

"I *am* better!" she told him. "What's better sells! And this is what sells!" She turned and gazed adoringly up at her own paintings.

What was left of the young man's composure slipped away. Picking up a pot of orchids, he flung it at Jennifer, missing her but hitting "Carnival." The glass shattered, and one jagged piece flew out, then dropped at an angle, severing Jennifer's left carotid artery. When she collapsed behind her desk, the young man couldn't see her, and preferred it that way. Head high, portfolio tucked under his arm, he walked calmly out of the offices of Karl International, Inc.

The police found him in Washington Square, holding a close-out sale on his portfolio. He dumfounded the arresting officers by saying, "I told her years ago. She should have used plexiglass."

While serving his sentence for manslaughter, he has done some of the finest work that has ever been labeled Prison Art.



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a *NEW* short story by

JEFFRY SCOTT

"Jools" Ibbs was a flattery man, master of the double and often single entendre, the shrewdly timed, murmured pass. Maybe Ibbs had been experimenting with his social image. If so, it had been a terrible mistake.

A complex and lusty story from Jeffry Scott, whose remarkable imagination takes his readers far and wide . . .

SHE TOLD ME TO

by JEFFRY SCOTT

Despite its pretentious name, the Arsgrata Theater was another brusquely remodeled loft in Greenwich Village. So Ned Lindrick, newly arrived from London, walked to his appointment through streets that might have been English, reassuringly devoid of grandeur, not to mention logical planning.

But the urban body-odor was pure, which is to say impure New York—hints of maturing garbage and expensive perfume, alien tobacco burning and the occasional cigarette using no tobacco at all, car fumes, old bricks still warm from the setting sun, cooking smells, a probably imagined breath of tidal water from the twin rivers.

Greying and studious, Ned Lindrick of Steeple Oaks in the County of Somerset felt a long way from home in every sense of the phrase. His heart beat sullenly.

Badged by a hand-lettered poster for that night's play, the Arsgrata's entrance was easy to find. He went straight in, fearing that hesitation would lead, literally, to flight. For JFK was temptingly close and some answers can be harder to live with than the most worrying questions.

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"Dressing rooms are next floor up," said the spotty youth who'd demanded his ticket. "She's expecting you."

But when Lindrick located the shabby door, tapped, and obeyed the muffled command to enter, his first impulse was to blunder straight out again. He'd never seen this woman before and now he was seeing entirely too much of her for his peace of mind.

She was magnificent in a way. Commercial carnality taken to parody point, demanding blush or snigger. White skintight shorts dramatizing her coffee tan, gilt dusting the wide cheekbones and alive on breasts that were all but exposed.

Suddenly a white-and-crimson smile appeared in the mirror. "It's me, Ned. Shut the door, huh?" Her reflection studied his and then a needle heel jabbed the floor and she made the stool swivel to face him.

No sparring nor pretense of a social encounter. Her tone was civil yet unyielding. "What d'you want? It was a long time ago. What's done is done and you'll never prove a damned thing."

Shoving his hands deep into his pockets, Lindrick leaned against the door. "Lapsed time is irrelevant when you wake up worrying over something. I was involved and I need to know what it was I got involved in. You owe me that much." More than the cubicle's stuffiness was making him sweat. "Call it fate or chance, but I came across some—odds and ends—after you'd all left. I found out what you do for a living. And about the Oakley Twins and the clays."

"Ah," she breathed, and held up a long-fingered hand. He couldn't tell whether she was dismayed to learn the worst or relieved at finding it so trivial. She was, after all, an actress.

Ned Lindrick blurted out: "What in the world's *happened* to you?"

Nonplussed, she looked down at herself and up at him and then, with her unaffected laugh, he knew her again, truly. "Makeup, sweetheart. Illusion, flash 'n trash, T and A, got-it-and-flaunt-it. You lovely, stuffy guy. You—you Brit! I play a hooker. Half an hour from now I'll *be* her, downstairs. You can watch."

"I'd rather listen." He took a deep breath. "I'm not a detective. I'd never hurt you. Just tell me why you murdered that man."

Every self-respecting English village must have a village idiot and a millionaire, just as London boasts the patron, founding spirits of Gog and Magog. Tony Payne wasn't a millionaire, merely comfortably off—but neither was he an idiot, so Steeple Oaks gave him

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the other role, like it or not. Ned Lindrick always suspected Payne *did* like it.

Fiftyish, amiable, only fairly boring and dense, Tony Payne was a former City businessman who had opted for early retirement to become big frog in the Steeple Oaks pond. His duties, being minimal, nominal, and self-imposed, weren't irksome. It boiled down to keeping the cricket club financed and giving frequent dinner parties.

Ned Lindrick dined at The Rectory perhaps twice a month, year in, year out, partly from bachelor jumping at hospitality, mainly out of a minor novelist's lust for raw material, though Tony Payne offered hackneyed stuff, really, fit for satire or a period piece.

Dinner with the Paynes involved a dark-suited houseman waiting at table (even Tony lacked the nerve for a butler in a house with only seven bedrooms) followed by bridge.

Lindrick found it all closer to amateur dramatics than outright affectation and snobbery.

The ritual of black tie, dinner jacket, and joining the ladies after token segregation over the port had long been in retreat. These days friends asked one around at the last moment for a bite to eat. Jeans and a (preferably clean) open-neck shirt were acceptable if not welcome, and the chef might well be the other side of the country, working at a frozen-food laboratory. Nobody joined the ladies because the ladies were right there.

None of that with the Paynes. It struck him as touching or tiresome, according to the state of his liver. Aware of being part of their scene-setting—a demi-celebrity and what is no longer known as A Gentleman—Ned Lindrick didn't scruple to be covertly mocking and gained mordant pleasure from those evenings. Or rather, from most of them. Towards the end, he dreaded an invitation.

It was the final feast that took him to New York.

Ned Lindrick had been the only person to hear the dying man's last words. Clear but cryptic, sounding baffled and aggrieved: *"She told me to."*

Characteristically, that was not the matter on Lindrick's mind. What tormented him was the riddle of why obnoxious Julian Ibbs had been set on twanging their hostess's nerves so cruelly, crassly, unrelentingly. It made no sense.

Ibbs was a womanizer, a compulsive cuckolder. Behaving like Dickens' Fat Boy wanting to make his listeners' flesh creep was rankly out of character. "Jools" Ibbs was a flattery man, master of the double and often single entendre, the shrewdly timed, murmured

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pass. Maybe Ibbs had been experimenting with his social image. If so, it had been a terrible mistake.

Lindrick's heart sank that summer morning when Amelie Payne phoned. He couldn't excuse himself again. Tony Payne would bristle at what he must take for a snub, while Amelie—"I'd love to," Ned Lindrick agreed hollowly, and swore after cradling the receiver.

Steeple Oaks was not only fond of Amelie but prized her as a character. "The things she says!" She was American, an engaging mixture of energy and sheer scattiness. Willowy, with a cast in one eye, a confusion of auburn hair, and a child's eagerness to please and be pleased. Age had begun triumphing over her, but an offbeat beauty lingered, persuasive-elusive as music from another room. Where some women might have been dismissed as past their prime or, more bluntly, "scraggy," the village spoke of Amelie as "fine-drawn" and the like.

Payne adored her, which was very proper. Lindrick perceived a kernel of vanity in the adoration, thinking that Tony was besotted with Amelie after a decade or more of marriage because she remained his junior and he was proud of a partner whom he saw as coveted and highly desirable.

If Ned Lindrick's heart sank at her phonecall, it slid into his boots when he arrived that evening and discovered that Jools Ibbs was a fellow guest. Armed with inside knowledge, he felt the circumstances to be painfully suitable. For a start, the numbers were odd and the sexes unbalanced: himself, Tony Payne, and Ibbs with Amelie and her sister Gertrude, over on a seemingly endless vacation from Manhattan.

And the weather was ambiguous, false. No real night outside the terrace windows. What feigned it were black thunderclouds, dark ramparts with lividly radiant foundations from the setting sun. Amelie was notoriously timid in storms, hardly rational when thunder crashed and lightning lanced. The village still chuckled compassionately over the tale of Amelie retreating to the closet under the stairs and conversing with guests who visited her in relays during one party. Fear of thunder is a very human phobia.

Already she was on edge. Already Tony Payne was compensating, seeking to obliquely reassure her, with enhanced heartiness threatening to turn his booming into a strangled shout. Already pallid

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Gertrude, watchful as a fencer, was pinking her sister with sighs and glances of naked contempt.

Lindrick, ignoring the byplay, was secretly fascinated by Jools Ibbs. Not the least sheltered nor puritanical, Lindrick could never get over the sheer unlikelihood of men who are successful with women. Ibbs wasn't particularly handsome, clever, or eloquent. What he was, Lindrick concluded amazedly, was *seedy*. When Jools had a new suit, his shoes would be cracked. If his nails were clean—by no means the rule—then he needed a haircut or his tie was stained. At present, dandruff was explicit on his black-velvet jacket and the beard, elaborately trimmed with channels of skin here and there, was absurd.

Gertrude Vine made Lindrick start. "What's on your mind, Mr. Writer?" Her tone was curiously bland—no particular word stressed, so that one had to listen hard instead of settling for tone-color.

Ned gave her a suspicious look. He couldn't get the hang of Gertrude—whether she liked or despised him, what made her tick. He didn't even know what she did for a living. He'd asked—his conversation tended toward grilling—and she'd shut him up like a telescope without actually snubbing him. Or answering the question.

Her shunning of cosmetics added to the drably enigmatic quality. At a little distance, Gertrude's sandy eyebrows vanished and her face turned to a pale oval. Her clothes, while never frumpish, were no more than acceptable coverings. She was younger than Amelie, with better bone planes, but registered as the senior, less attractive sister.

Possibly she didn't like men and took most means short of open hostility to rebuff their interest. That might also account for her thinly veiled disapproval of her far more conventionally feminine sister.

Puzzling over Gertrude, it took Ned a moment to realize that Amelie's voice had soared in protest.

"Just quit it, Jools!"

Smirking, Ibbs appealed to the rest of them. "Well, it *is* quite droll—our last big storm, when that idiot groundsman got killed. He insisted on using a cast-iron roller in the thick of the lightning." He chuckled discordantly. "There was a perfect replica of the body scorched on the turf afterward. It made the bowling green unplayable all summer."

"Drop it, Jools," Tony Payne grunted, turning away. To Lindrick he said, "The wretched fellow's practically living here these days.

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Amelie's got the decorating bug. We're going Regency, if you please, and blessed Jools has pound signs in his eyes."

Ibbs ran an antique store, one of his traits being to make customers of friends, then startle them by charging well above the market price. The Paynes were foregone targets, but that wasn't the reason for Jools haunting their home. Weeks before, birdwatching on Hangstone Hill in the gloaming, Ned Lindrick's binoculars had shown Ibbs and Amelie making love among the ferns. He had spun away, sickened and dismayed at being a Peeping Tom, even accidentally, momentarily.

Amelie was leading the party to the polished timber pool of Georgian dining table. The servants were away, she explained, so the meal was a cold one. And chilled white wine, Lindrick surmised gloomily, nostalgic for Tony's superb claret. In the same instant, as only humans can, he was asking himself: What on earth does she see in a shocker like Ibbs?

The storm was much closer by the time they reached the salmon. Jools was persisting with a ghost story which he'd dragged in after the innocent introduction of village myths. Thunder made a sound of giant railway wagons trundling across the sky and Amelie kept wincing and shivering.

"It was a cow," Ned Lindrick broke in. "A black-and-white cow, not a headless horse. Everybody knows that, Jools. Low comedy, not gothic horror." He earned a grateful beam from Tony and was pleased to see Amelie laughing and regaining her spirits.

But Jools, far from defeated, was simply regrouping. Cutting himself rather a lot of brie, he asked casually, "Have they caught him yet?"

The walls of the room jumped, a huge flashbulb went off. The thunder's impact was physical, making the ears ring. Amelie screamed and cowered, and Tony's chair tumbled as he leaped to yank the curtains across the french windows. "Soon be over," he yelled, and guffawed idiotically.

Gertrude, waiting for silence, prompted, "Caught who?"

Ibbs smirked again, making them wait until he drank from his glass. "Sorry. Didn't you hear? My radio was full of it earlier—they had a newsflash while I was showering." He jerked his tufted chin at the curtains. He rented what had been the gardener's cottage at the foot of The Rectory's drive.

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"At least," Ned Lindrick said desperately, "we'll get some rain. The ground's crying out for it."

Gertrude shook her head at him. "Shut up, Ned, this sounds intriguing."

"Interesting. Intriguing is the practice of plotting, conspiring."

"Dictionary man." She turned her attention to Ibbs. "Go on, Jools. What's happening?"

"Durrington Dene," Ibbs replied, as if that said it all. Ostensibly to newcomer Gertrude, he amplified, "It's coyly known as a security hospital, but that translates as prison for the criminally insane." Slitting his eyes, he growled and rocked his shaggy head.

Lindrick wanted to kick him. Amelie fretted over that place, hardly two miles away across the moors. The Paynes had led a futile villagers' campaign to close it after a previous escape.

"They've lost another one. Some violent psychopath got out this afternoon," Jools announced. "Still at large, or he was an hour ago."

Cords were visible in Amelie's neck. Even Gertrude looked abashed. "Bloody fool!" Tony Payne said. "I say, sorry, but really, Jools old lad! You know how Amelie worries!"

"Oh, we know." Gertrude, toneless as ever, addressed her plate. "Poor Amelie, highly strung. As in tennis racquet." She smiled sourly. "Come on, Tony, Amelie's famous nerves make her the center of attention. Recommended therapy is to take no notice."

Ned Lindrick rushed to fill the appalled pause. "An escape from Durrington? Are you sure you're not making it up, Jools? We'd have heard the siren."

"Wind's set the wrong way. Why would I make it up?"

Amelie was on her feet. "I'm getting the gun." Even under stress, Lindrick smiled. He'd seen the famous gun. Tony Payne had talked largely about rough-shooting and bought a .410 shotgun before finding out that he couldn't hit a barn door at fifty feet. If you were an excellent shot, or firing at point-blank range, you might just disable a motionless adversary.

"Sit down." It was Gertrude—dismissive, coldly angry. "You don't know one end of a shotgun from the other."

She stood up, tossing her napkin on the chair. "Listen, I have to call New York. Tony, I left the coffee perking. You and Amelie bring it in." The company finding that a touch brusk, failed to worry Gertrude. "Amelie, you're a sweet soul and a born fool, so don't go improving on Nature's handiwork. Simmer down and have a brandy—I'll be right back to keep the boogie-man at bay."

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Calm and stinging.

The Paynes did as they were told. Jools grinned conspiratorially. "I say, didn't I liven things up!"

Lindrick, fingers wanting to be fists, was framing his reply when Ibbs shoved his chair back and prowled to the drapes. Opening the french windows he reported, "The shower's passed." He mimed unzipping his pants. "I'm going to water that Italian marble cupid the chump bought off me last year—phony as a three-quid note." Bubbling with unseemly mirth, he strutted out onto the terrace.

Jools's absence roused little comment. He often wandered away after being fed, to escape bridge or to kiss a hostess or her daughter in the garden.

While the men labored to keep conversation alive, Amelie was far away, answering in thoughtful nods, her eyes roaming, her head cocked but not listening to Lindrick or her husband.

Gertrude returned as they were pouring second cups of coffee, complaining about the British phone system as if poor Tony Payne was to blame.

Lindrick had an old-maidish eye for detail, and having passed her a coffee and a balloon of brandy, he picked a splinter of blue-painted wood, smaller than a matchstick, from her angora stole. The fabric felt clammy, but he forgot that as she bristled. "Do you mind? I hate being mauled."

Ears and cheeks warm, he slunk back to his chair. Amelie smiled abstractedly. "I guess we're all edgy, Ned. Oh, something I forgot." And she fled upstairs.

Five minutes later, Gertrude, who had been drumming her unpainted nails on the table, said abruptly, "Too long. I'll go find what she's up to."

The noise froze them—far less loud than the earlier thunder, but more definite, with a flat, vicious, spitting quality. Ned Lindrick's stomach turned over. He thought: That was a .410 or I'm a Dutchman. He sprinted out to the terrace.

Amelie was still holding the shotgun, its barrel no thicker than a dandy's cane. The damp night air was spiced with a tang of smokeless powder.

Jools Ibbs sprawled at her feet, curled into a foetal, clenched bundle that leaked blood. Lindrick, down on one knee, heard: "She told me to."

Amelie Payne, clutching the lethal toy of a weapon, British coun-

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try children's first gun, fit for nothing but knocking over close-range rabbits, was weeping. Teeth chattering, she keened, "I *meant* to shoot him, but how could I kill *Jools?*"

Her cryptic remark was explained at the inquest, where the verdict was unlawful killing. Amelie, returning to the dining room, had seen a shadowy movement on the terrace, slipped into her husband's den for the .410, and gone outside to challenge the intruder.

The man—she had no inkling that it was Julian Ibbs—wheeled 'round on hearing her. Pressing the trigger was an unthinking reflex, a spasm of movement to fend him off. Ibbs's shirt had been scorched by the muzzle flash, he had been that close when the tiny but densely packed pellets emerged.

Lindrick observed Tony Payne crumble as the coroner lectured on gun owners' responsibilities and obligations. Even a light sporting weapon should have been under lock and key—leaving it loaded and the safety catch off was unpardonable.

The trial saw Amelie convicted of manslaughter. She collapsed when the jury returned, received a suspended sentence, and spent the next month in a nursing home. Steeple Oaks saw no more of the Paynes. Tony took his wife to Bermuda and there was talk of them making a new home in Portugal.

Ned Lindrick, obliged to testify at both hearings, couldn't talk to the couple. He did go to London later, though. Having lied by omission bothered him not at all. "She told me to" from a man in gunshot trauma could signify anything. And Amelie needed no red herrings to worsen her plight. She'd been lucky that her relationship with Jools Ibbs had never emerged.

Tony Payne met Lindrick in the foyer of the Dorchester. He had aged a decade, spiritually rather than outwardly. There was a peevish, almost furtive aura about him now, deflation and uncertainty. "I can't talk, Ned. I'm sorry, but it's all too—" And he gestured vaguely.

Detective-Inspector Shea, a high-flyer from County Police HQ, was affable, knowing, and desperately deep. He didn't make social calls, so Ned Lindrick was on guard when Shea visited him before the trial.

"Tragic accident?" the policeman echoed, something feral about the angle of his blue chin and level stare. "No great loss, I'd say. Ibbs was a blackmailer, you know."

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Stunned, seeing where that led, Lindrick said nothing.

"Surely you wondered about Ibbs's obsessive chasing of married women, sir? No? Well, there's a strange pattern. Soon as he dropped a conquest, and they never lasted much longer than a month or so, then the woman would be in financial trouble. More often than not, leastways. Caught pilfering or stealing from the cash register, or their husband's business would start reporting thefts."

"What's the point, if you have one?" Ned Lindrick asked crisply, and Shea stiffened.

"I think you know, sir. If Mrs. Payne was more than casually, respectably friendly with a blackmailer who died by violence, need I go on?"

Lindrick fell back on the outraged ploy, delivering a lightning sketch of his grandfather, a peppery magistrate. "Monstrous! Vile slander! There's no reason to suggest any such thing!" he lied. Then, fastening on an earlier remark: "Patterns, you said. There's no proof that Ibbs blackmailed anyone!"

"Funny you should raise that, sir." Shea wasn't amused but resigned. "I went straight to his cottage after examining the body and taking your initial statements. Too late by an hour or two. Somebody had broken in—a rough, amateur job, the door levered open. Signs of a hurried but effective search, drawers emptied on the floor, and so on. Effective because there wasn't a compromising letter or photo to be found."

Relieved, Lindrick pointed out, "Amelie couldn't have done that. We were together all evening until—what happened. *Nor could I,*" he added warmly, irked by Shea's pursed lips and frowning regard.

"Don't shout until you're hurt, sir. I never suggested you had. I'm counting on your help, you being such a noticing gentleman. Were there any signs that the lady and Mr. Ibbs were closer friends than has been supposed?"

While giving insincerely vehement denial, Lindrick was shaken by what he *had* noticed: Gertrude's damp stole and the blue splinter he'd removed from it.

The stole would have saved her hair from the last spatters of the shower, if worn on her head, while rain spots wouldn't have been noticeable on her drably dark dress. And Ibbs's cottage had blue paintwork. But Gertrude was the last person who would have raided the place to destroy potential evidence against her despised sister. It wasn't convincing in human terms, so he kept his self-challenged guesses to himself . . .

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Some years later, a Lindrick novel, deservedly out of print, fetched an indecent sum of money from a Hollywood producer, catapulting its author into a new world where shadow dominated substance and great men took meetings while erecting lies of architectural scale. Ned—"our English writer, *fiercely* intelligent, a talent"—wintered in Los Angeles and in due time eight lines of his script joined hundreds more from others in what kinder friends excused as "a mitigated disaster."

And he met Sue, who had among other things a mole on her hip and a soft spot for expatriates. Waiting for her to finish work one evening, perched on her desk and rifling through the portraits found around any casting consultant's lair, he was astounded to be looking at Amelie's sister Gertrude.

Sue, blonde cottage-loaf of hair a parking place for pencils and aviator glasses, heard Lindrick's whistled surprise and leaned over his shoulder. "Oh, yeah, right. Gertrude Vine's her real name. Off-off Broadway lady. The word is she's pretty good. Streep she isn't, or not yet, but we ought to use her sometime."

Sue's softly pretty face grew concerned. Ned Lindrick had groaned and shaken his head. He was thinking of his smug assumption that he had identified and weighed Gertrude's attitude toward Amelie. He had been perfectly led by the nose. *An actress.*

Next morning, over breakfast, Lindrick asked Sue: "How do I find out more about Gertrude Vine without actually hiring a private eye? It's not the least romantic or sexy, word of honor."

Her expression cleared. "I'll ask around. There's always a friend of a friend with so much back-and-forthing between Broadway and the Coast."

Within a week Lindrick was at Lake Tahoe entertaining an entertainer, a fat and jolly singer called Lindry Lew, who was voluble and artless, a self-priming pump.

"Do I know Gert and Am? Are you kidding? We were Village roomies way back when. Gert homely? Get your eyes tested! She was the beauty. Am had personality and she was nice people, but she had that squint—"

Why, she suggested, didn't Lindrick order *big* big drinks this time around, and a sandwich or two? Poolside air gave a girl an appetite. "The three of us waited table," she recalled, having explained that the big-drinks policy saved the poor waitress a hike. "Yeah, the three of us—me and the Oakley Twins."

His spine tingled. "Why do you call them that?"

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The fat woman was surprised. "Never heard of Annie Oakley? The sharpshooter? That was Gert and Am. Place down the road had a clay-pigeon contest every weekend. When Gert didn't win the fifty-buck prize, Am did."

Lindrick was hearing Gertrude accusing her sister of not knowing one end of a shotgun from the other, without contradiction. It gave him a new slant on Tony Payne's distress at the inquest. Payne hadn't been ashamed of his negligence *because when he'd put the .410 away, it had been locked up, unloaded, with the safety catch on.*

Which in turn, and belatedly, made him consider the implications of Gertrude ransacking Julian Ibbs's home without bothering to hide signs of a search.

Somehow, Gertrude had known, or at least expected, that Ibbs wouldn't make a fuss. And the likeliest reason for that was that she also expected him to be dead before returning to the cottage.

"You okay, honey?" Lindry Lew patted his arm. "Guess it rains all the time in England. Sun's making you nauseous."

Shaken, disoriented, Lindrick finished his script work and, shirking a confrontation, flew home to Somerset and sanity. Then the questions came back on the attack, driving him back to Greenwich Village, the Arsgrata Theater, and Gertrude.

Wearily matter-of-fact, Gertrude Vine said: "Yes, we killed him, Ned. There were reasons. You're not the only one having trouble sleeping, sometimes, but I'd do it again. Now just listen, don't butt in—I'll only tell this once. It hurts."

She took a shuddering breath. "Amelie's dead. We lost her soon after the trial. She was dying that summer, that's why I was there—*part* of why."

"Dear God," Lindrick muttered.

"Yes," Gertrude agreed sardonically. "She'd seen specialists. It was terminal and there'd be only a short remission."

"Did Tony know?"

"Like hell. He'd have gone to pieces on her and Am was at the breaking-point as it was. Oh, it wasn't selfish of her—she wanted to save him the waiting."

She stayed silent for perhaps half a minute. Then: "You've got to understand how much she hated Julian Ibbs. He'd made that precious little remnant of her life dirty and worthless. I'll come to the whys and wherefores later.

"She rang me one night, here in Manhattan, nearly out of her

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head. Pure rage and fury. What the doctors told her was a side-issue. She intended to kill Ibbs the minute she hung up on me, march down to that cottage, and blow him away."

Gertrude ripped a tissue from the box at her side, stared at it unknowingly, lips trembling. "I couldn't stop her, I never could. But I begged her to wait for me. Am's all I ever had."

"You loved her."

She laughed. "Yes. Fooled you, huh? That was part of Plan B, general cover. If the worst came to the worst, I figured, a sister's evidence wouldn't be worth much. So I set up the hostility, sibling-rivalry bit just in case. It could have made that inch of difference.

"You liked Amelie, Ned. Everyone did. Other-worldly, wasn't that what you said she was, once? Well, she *was.* A lot of stuff just rolled off her knife, same as gravy. Everybody knew Julian was a loser, and worse. But not Amelie.

"And he came on to her just after she got back from Harley Street after hearing the final diagnosis, saying he loved her. She believed it. She was vulnerable as never before. I think she wanted to get everything from life before it ran out on her. And Tony would never know.

"Okay, they had a fling. And then Ibbs pulled the blackmail thing. And Amelie—Amelie—"

Her sister broke off, her face bleak under the paint. "If he had told Tony, Tony would have crumbled up and seeped away."

Lindrick felt a wash of borrowed, resurrected anger. "The bastard. So he was bleeding her white."

Gertrude stared at him. She swore incredulously. "You men! Your grains are set in grooves! Amelie had the money. She had a generous settlement from her first husband. Tony put up the front, took the credit, and Amelie slipped him his walking-around money and bought his fancy clothes and wine. Julian Ibbs couldn't have bled her white if he'd gone on overtime. It was the *betrayal,* dummy! Amelie believed his lies and let herself be conned into cheating on Tony for the first time. And it was just to get money, not even to get her into bed for a quick thrill! Ibbs was dead the minute he started shaking her down. She only held off as long as she did for my sake.

"Anyway, I dreamed up the scenario. Hysterical housewife shoots intruder. Jools had been working on me. He bought the rivalry act between Amelie and me and hinted that they had been an item. Invited me to steal her stud."

She spun the stool to the corner, hands to her face. "It was obscene,

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but I played him along. I said if he really loved me, he'd get Am's nerves to screaming pitch, in front of me. I fed him those lines—the storm stuff and the fake jailbreak."

"She told me to." That parting whisper, liquid with unleashed blood, revived in Lindrick's mind.

"I'd already told him to meet me in the garden after dinner for his—reward. He loved the idea. Then I slipped out and broke into his place, made sure it could never be proven he was a blackmailer. That way there'd be no motive for Am to kill him. You know the rest."

Gertrude stood up, crystals of sweat on the gilding and pancake makeup. "Amelie's death sentence was passed before she killed him. But I'm still an evil woman, right?"

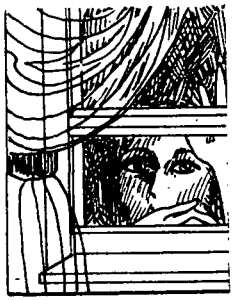
"I'm not a detective," Ned Lindrick repeated, "and God knows I'm not a judge."

His eyes were prickling, but she was unmoved. "Sure. Tell them out front I said to give you a good seat."

Lindrick nodded, but he walked straight out of the theater and kept going until his feet were sore and his mind empty of all but fatigue.

Tomorrow he'd catch the plane. Send up a prayer for the sisters. Get on with his life, less smug, immeasurably less certain of his ability to observe and file his fellow beings from a glance, a random remark, a tone of voice.

The last thing in the world he wanted was to watch another play.



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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

EQMM "first story" author #627, Lawrence D. Myers, is co-founder and proprietor of Sam: Johnson's Bookshop in West Los Angeles. "It is an admirable shop," he says, "named after the Great Lexicographer (one of our idols) and dedicated to making available all sorts of good second-hand books."

As far as writing goes, he adds: "I am patient and painstaking, keeping things by me for years, polishing and repolishing until I feel they are done. Only lately have I felt ready to publish." And so we have his first professional story, the narrative of an introverted young eyewitness to murder . . .

I SAW

by LAWRENCE D. MYERS

I know who killed Ellie Parsons. I watched it happen. When he pushed that knife into her and made her die, I was there. I saw.

She was a nice girl, Ellie. No one knows why anybody'd want to kill her. As for *who,* they've given up even trying to guess. I know, of course. I know both answers. But I'm not going to say anything, not yet. Maybe later; it depends.

It's lonesome here in Westonville, a small town and never anybody new. There aren't many young folks, not my age, and those there are won't have much to do with me. Jackson Whipple, he's my best friend, but I don't like him much. The girls are worse. It's not so bad during schooltime. Most of the day you're in class, and at recess there's generally something doing in the yard that you can get in on—unless you'd rather stay out. Afterwards, the chores pretty much fill up the time till evening. In summer it's not so nice. You're on your own a lot. The fellows usually are busy with themselves and the girls won't have anything to do with you anyway.

I read a lot. I read mostly books of adventures, but I like mystery

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stories, too. The way it happens in the books, I found out, it's lots nicer than it is in real life. It was awful when he stabbed her. I was sick.

Lester Franklin stopped me the other day when I was going to the store for some flour. "Son, you go around a lot after dark," he said. "You don't know anything about this, do you?"

"No, sir," I told him, "I generally go out past town and walk around in the fields. It's peaceful there."

He wasn't really suspicious, just hopeful. Everybody knows I go out after dark; they don't think anything about it. They don't know that I generally fetch up at Ellie's. She never was particular with her front-room curtains, and I liked to watch her reading or knitting or cleaning up. She was awfully pretty. But she was careful with her bedroom curtains. There were lots of bushes in her garden, big thick bushes. Nobody ever guessed that I was there. *He* didn't—that's where I was when he killed her, looking through the window. He liked her, too, only he didn't just want to look.

Of course, sometimes I did go out to the fields and stay there. It's nice out there in the dark, sometimes nicer than at Ellie's. That's when I don't mind being alone. I like the stars. I like the long stretch of the fields to the horizon, especially when the moon's just starting up. Then somehow things don't matter so much.

Mam and Pap don't understand it. They don't like me much. They want me to be like the other kids. Mam yells a lot at me, but I'm used to that now. Pap beats me sometimes when I do things wrong, even sometimes when I don't. He beat me the other day for slopping the milk pail. He'd better not do it again.

I was down at Bowden's a day or two ago, giving a hand with the haying. Wes Hale was there, too. He's kind of a bully, and he was tearing into little Ed Frickett something awful. Ed's wife once caught him making a pass at Ellie and she slugged him, right there in public. It was at a party. I saw that, too. Wes had brought that up and was trying to make out there was something between Ed and Ellie. Ed took it a long while, then he laid Wes out cold with the handle of his pitchfork. The men told Wes he was lucky he didn't get the prongs instead. Folks around here can be awfully hot-tempered, especially when the summer's as hot as this one is.

Today after chores I went swimming in the creek. Michael Parker was there—nobody else. He didn't stay long after I came. I didn't mind much; there were things I wanted to think over. I lay in the water where it was shady, under the trees. I felt cool for the first

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time in a week. Mam and Pap were fighting again at home, but I lay in the cool water and didn't care any more. After a while I thought about Ellie. I guess I'm glad her bedroom curtains were always closed—otherwise, it wouldn't be so nice to think of her somehow. Someday I hope I'll forget that other part.

I was a lot quieter in my mind when I got home. Right away Pap tried to pick a fight with me, saying that he told me to hoe the garden and I hadn't. Well, that's Saturday's job and this is only Friday, and I told him so, and after a bit he backed down. I thought he was going to beat me for a while. He'd just better not. If he does I'll tell for sure.

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a *NEW* Sam Train story by

ERNEST SAVAGE

Sam got out the picture of Candace and set it carefully on the bar between them. They stared at it for a long time in silence and then Bill said softly, "Golly."

"Yeah, golly. The famous, long-missing, and seldom seen genuine Girl Next Door . . ."

HURT BUT GETTING BETTER

by ERNEST SAVAGE

From a black-leather satchel hooked to the side of his motorized wheelchair he took out ten one-hundred-dollar bills and then reached in and took out three more. The satchel bulged—possibly with nothing but money, possibly not. I was standing six feet away, but one's blood stirs.

He said, "I've been advised of your fee, Mr. Train. Two hundred dollars a day plus expenses. This is for five days of your time—a start, anyway." He proffered the money my way, his almost fleshless arm quivering in extension.

I said, "Is that your bank, that satchel?"

He smiled and the arm folded back into his lap. "I was born and raised in Marblehead, Massachusetts, Mr. Train. In 1933 my father lost his life's savings in a bank failure. It left its mark. But no, I do maintain bank accounts, and yes, the satchel has other things than money in it." His arm extended again and it became that moment of decision: if I took the money, I was hired.

"Not yet," I said. "I want to know more."

What I knew was this. His name was Ricardo Canelli. He was fifty-seven years old and dying of some undisclosed wasting disease. He owned and lived in an old but large and well-cared-for house in

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a middling-rich neighborhood not far from Lafayette Park in the beleaguered city of San Francisco. One week ago almost to the hour (this was a Monday morning), his twenty-six-year-old wife walked out of the house and hadn't been seen or heard from since. Her name was Candace.

There was a resident housekeeper who'd let me in downstairs and a resident nurse whom I'd not yet seen. Candace told the housekeeper she was going shopping and would be back before suppertime. She'd been driven away in a cab the housekeeper had called for her. She was dressed in a cream-colored suit with black accessories, including a black purse. She wore black-framed, large-lensed dark glasses plus certain items of jewelry.

Candace (nee Candace Zaleski) and Canelli had been married for nineteen months. She'd been introduced to Canelli one Sunday afternoon aboard his yacht, moored at pier 39, by his lawyer, Joseph Alturas, who'd brought her there as a guest for the day. They were married the following Friday in Tahoe. They'd been blissfully happy together (he said), and since she had no family here (she'd been born and raised in Myrtle Beach, North Carolina) and no friends known to him, he'd phoned Alturas at ten o'clock last Monday evening when she'd failed to return by then.

Alturas had recommended against informing the police as useless (true) and Tuesday morning early had brought to Canelli's house a private investigator named James Knowles. Knowles went to work at once and determined quickly from a check of the cab company's trip-sheets that Candace had left the cab downtown in front of the St. Francis Hotel, but he'd been unable to trace her from there. There had been no demand for ransom or anything of that sort.

Then last Friday afternoon Knowles had appeared here, excited. He had in his possession a ring he'd redeemed from an Oakland pawnshop that fit the description of one Candace had been wearing when last seen. It was a unique ring—a large sapphire surrounded by rubies and set in platinum. It had belonged to Canelli's mother and had been worn previously by his first wife until her death four years ago. Canelli identified it at once and gave Knowles the $2,700 he'd paid to redeem it, plus a $300 bonus. He said he was terribly disturbed at the sight of the ring. He said he wanted his wife back desperately.

Then Sunday morning (yesterday) Knowles' body had been found in Golden Gate Park, shot through the head. Canelli read about it

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in the Monday-morning *Chronicle*—just hours ago—and called me. I got here at eleven o'clock.

Now his hand recoiled once again back into his lap and I said, "What made you call me instead of the first name in the yellow pages?"

"I'd heard about you from a friend of mine. He told me you'd been a lieutenant on the police force until the strike in 'seventy-five. I like it that you quit in protest."

"Is that it—you're against strikes?"

"I'm against cops striking, and nurses and doctors and people like that."

I let it rest. In his present state, a doctors' strike could well prove fatal. I said, "Did you clear my name with Alturas before phoning me this morning?"

"No."

"Why not, Mr. Canelli?"

"I saw no reason to. I see no reason to now. Do you know Joseph?"

"No, I never heard of him. Nor have I ever heard of Knowles. Incidentally," I said, "what prompted Knowles to check pawnshops for your wife's jewelry at this stage of the game?"

"Ah. Well, he wasn't checking pawnshops per se. This one is owned by a friend of his and he just happened to drop in there shortly after the ring had been turned in."

"Turned in by your wife?"

"No, I'm sorry to say. Turned in by a man." He understood clearly the implications of that and blinked, his boney chin sagging.

"May I see," I said, "the pawnshop receipt Knowles gave you?"

He sighed, a racking sigh that shook his skeletal frame. "I didn't ask him for it, Mr. Train. Since he *had* the ring I assumed he'd redeemed it. As I said, I was very disturbed."

"But you paid him."

"Yes."

"Did he *demand* that you pay him?"

"Well—he asked firmly, I must say, that I repay at once the twenty-seven hundred he'd paid. He said it broke him. But the ring is worth far more than that, believe me."

"And the three hundred—was that your idea or his?"

"Well—"

"His?"

"Yes, I'm afraid so."

"And you took the money out of that satchel of yours—"

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"Yes."

"Did Knowles know beforehand that you kept cash there?"

"Yes, I suppose he did. It was no secret. I pay the household wages and various other expenses from it. It's easier. It gives me something to do. The bank brings it over as required."

"Did you tell Alturas what Knowles had done?"

"Yes. Last Saturday."

"Not Friday—not immediately after?"

"No. Saturday afternoon. I was too—upset."

"And Alturas did what?"

"He said he'd discuss it with Knowles. 'Review it,' he said."

"Did he?"

"I don't know. I haven't spoken with him since."

"And now," I said, "Knowles is dead."

"Yes." Canelli's dark eyes loomed large in his shrunken face, his Roman nose a veritable promontory there. His skin tone was pearly, his still thick hair dead-white. He had once been a handsome man, now clearly dying. *Cui boni?*—a lawyerish expression that frequently crosses my mind: Who benefits?

"You've made a will, Mr. Canelli?"

"Yes, of course." Oddly, it perked him up.

"Favoring Mrs. Canelli."

"She will be adequately provided for, Mr. Train, but the great bulk of my estate will go for research into neuro-muscular disorders, several of which afflict me." He was sitting straighter, looking almost aggressive. This was a fight he could participate in, whereas confined in that chair he couldn't help find his missing wife.

"You say 'great bulk,' Mr. Canelli. That suggests a lot of money. May I ask what your estate is worth?"

"You may. After taxes, a little more than four million." His large dark eyes had narrowed, a reflex.

"Out of which Mrs. Canelli will be 'adequately provided for.' Could you put a figure to *that,* sir?"

He sighed and seemed ashamed as he said, "She'll receive two thousand a month for life."

I was surprised, but said nothing.

Silence is a great prompter. He sighed again, agitated. "*She* set the figure, not me. She insisted it be no more than that. She actually wanted less."

"Why?"

"I didn't know why at the time, but now I think I do. She fears

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money—too much money—which is not unwise. Moreover, she has a great natural asset—the knack for happiness."

He squared his winglike shoulders as though I might attack these appraisals as whimsy or deceit. It was tempting, but I said, "When was the will drawn?"

"Shortly after we were married."

"Drawn by Mr. Alturas?"

"Yes."

"You had this—physical condition then?"

"Yes. It's a progressive disease, Mr. Train. Nothing can stop it. Not yet!" They were fighting words.

A large barrel-shaped woman lumbered into the room with a tray of food—Canelli's lunch. She was the nurse. I stepped aside as one steps aside for a truck.

"Soob," the powerful woman said. "Also a cudlet of veal. Ede it. Ede it all. Yes?"

She had both an obscure accent and a cold in the nose. She glared at Canelli a moment and then cruised past me to the door, where she turned and said, "He sleebs after he edes, you understand?"

I nodded. "I understand."

She had put the tray on a formica surface supported by chrome-plated arms that swung out from a columnar device alongside his chair. Also attached to the column, but swung aside for the moment, was another formica surface equipped with a vise, clamps, and tools, upon which a model sailing ship was being assembled, a Baltimore Clipper, the rakish lines of which I'd recognized at once on entering the room. I built the same model myself somewhat less than a million years ago.

Organizing himself to eat, Canelli once again proferred the bills in his hand and I took them. Hired. Obligated to find this dying man's young wife with whom he said he'd known bliss. I'd not heard that word used in years and couldn't attach it in any way to what I had seen and surmised here. But at least he didn't seem to be in pain.

I said, "I'll need a picture of your wife, Mr. Canelli."

He put down his soupspoon and sticking a hand into that cornucopian satchel of his, he came up with a manila envelope, which he handed to me with a miserly kind of reluctance. "I want it back," he said querulously. "It's the only good picture I have of her."

"Did Knowles ask for one?"

He stared into space for a moment and then said, "No, he didn't."

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I wasn't surprised. "I'll take care of it," I said, told him to enjoy his lunch, and left the room.

I'm not great around the dying—I wouldn't do well in a hospice—but I couldn't help but admire the man. He was dying a modern death, comfortable, fully equipped, and busy. At hand in the array of gear around his motorized chair was a TV remote-control unit, a phone, a bookshelf, that all-purpose black satchel, and a beguiling toy to play with—something to build, something to conjure a boyhood dream.

But overbalancing all that, a missing wife whom he loved. It was not a good deal. He was suffering.

At the door downstairs, I was intercepted by the giant nurse. "Whadever id is thad you do," she said sternly, "do id fast, mister. He's god liddle time only."

"I'll try," I said.

Bill Brady was at the bar in Nandino's when I got there at quarter to one. Bill's still on the force, Mondays and Tuesdays off. For ten of the nineteen years I spent as a cop, he and I shared the same squad car and the same meaty, sometimes deadly slice of life. There is no partnership as close as that; nor as touchy; nor, when it works, as binding. Monday lunch at Nandino's is one of its remaining ties.

"What about," I said, fingers wrapped around a large cold glass of Boodles martini, "the Knowles killing? Yesterday morning, in case I've got to remind you. Golden Gate Park."

"Shop talk, huh? Right off."

"What else? Okay, how are you? Now—what about Knowles?" Cops don't make many friends who aren't cops, or talk about much that's not cop work. For a cop, the state of the world is the state of his precinct.

"Me," he said, "I got a backache and the same old belly problem. Also, my feet hurt. Knowles—he's dead and out of it, the lucky stiff. That's what that expression means—lucky stiff."

"Sure it does. Tell me how he got that way."

"He was shot in the head in his car—twenty-five-thousand bucks' worth of Corvette!" Conspicuous displays of wealth rile Bill. He makes onerous alimony payments and drives a fourteen-year-old car, as I do—symbols of honest, if plodding, men.

"Which side of the head, right or left? Or front or back? Was he behind the wheel?"

"How would I know, shamus? It's not my problem."

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"I understand that, but you could go make a phone call and find out all about it, couldn't you, love? Meanwhile, I'll order a couple more of these here beauties."

"And pay for them, you mean."

"And pay for them."

"I'll be right back."

He was gone more than ten minutes. He's a good cop, he doesn't ask just one question, he asks the whole sundry lot. When he got back, he had the full dossier: James Knowles had been forty-one when he died. He'd been a cop on the New York City force for seven years, had quit there and come here eight years ago, setting up as a private investigator, properly licensed. He was unmarried, five feet eleven, had blondish hair, bluish eyes, a baddish reputation, allegedly on the take, the smell of blackmail and extortion in his wake. He had a small office on the second floor of an old building on Geary Street, sharing a secretary with the guy in the office next door.

"There was a six-pack of beer on the floor of the Corvette," Bill said, "like maybe he was on his way to the beach. But no swimming gear."

"Which side of the head, Bill?"

"Right. Behind the ear. Guy sitting next to him in the passenger bucket did it."

"Or gal."

"Okay, or gal. It was a .32-caliber shot, so it could have been a gal. Or a child, for that matter. He was suckered, blind-sided, the car in motion when he got hit. He ran off the parkway and into a patch of oleander bushes."

"Anyway," I said, "somebody he knew."

"Beyond a doubt. Somebody he knew who didn't like him. And I take it you've got some business interest in all this rich inside information."

"Drink your drink."

I got out the picture of Candace and set it carefully on the bar between us. We stared at it for a long time in silence and then Bill said softly, "Golly."

"Yeah, golly. The famous, long-missing, and seldom seen genuine Girl Next Door."

"Marilyn Monroe eyes."

"Right. Wistful yet still somehow happy and smiling. Hurt but getting better—" We drank to her.

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"Who is she?"

I told him the whole story and he said, indignant, "And you think maybe she aced Knowles?"

"No. No way. We share a first look at this beauty. It was a mere possibility, now forever scratched."

Bill finished his drink and said again, to himself, to a lingering picture in his mind, "Golly." He had a daughter roughly Candace's age, and in a father's heart, born when she is born, remains the never quite dead hope that she will be the Goddess of Peace who will walk through life as through a mythic dream, stopping men in their frenzied tracks, civilizing the world.

"I've got to call Alturas," I said and went back past the cans to where the phone is. It was 1:30. A female voice answered after the seventh ring, saying tentatively, "Yes?"

"Mr. Alturas, please."

"I'm sorry, he's not in."

"When will he be?"

"I'm not sure—"

"Is he in court?"

"No, he's not in court today."

"Home?"

"I doubt that, sir." My tone of voice had raised her hackles.

I said more sweetly, "May I have his home address and phone number, please? It's important."

"I'm not permitted to give out his address, sir, but his number is—" She recited digits and I wrote them down in my notebook, hung up, and went back to where Bill had taken two fresh drinks to a table and ordered our standard lunch—heavy cop food.

He'd been thinking. He said, "You mean to tell me the old man bought that slime from Knowles about the ring—and actually forked over three grand?"

"That's what I mean to tell you. I didn't have the heart to set him straight."

"What it means," Bill said, "is that the girl is either in on it, or dead. Me—I prefer dead. What about the lawyer?"

"Not in his office, not in court, possibly at home. Home's not listed in the book, but I've got his number here." I looked at it again in the open notebook and said, "The hell I do! What I've got here is his answering-service number, which—I'm slow today—is also *my* answering-service number."

"You guys," Bill said sourly. "You goddamn lawyers and private

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eyeballs and movie stars with no known home numbers, and sometimes no known homes—"

"I've got a home, Bill, and several people know where it is, including you. What I've got is an unlisted number—and possibly Alturas does, too. It's because we both like to sleep at night undisturbed. Except by appointment."

"Yeah, sure," he said, still sour, and lowered his drink by half. He was still brooding about the missing girl, as I was. A possibly dead girl, a light gone out.

It can spoil your lunch.

Rachel Haas is one of the thousands of lesbians that this open-armed town comfortably embraces. She owns and runs the answering service that both Alturas and I subscribe to and she drinks the most expensive brand of scotch known to man. I put a colorfully cartoned bottle of the precious stuff on her desk and said, "I want you to break one of your silly little rules of confidentiality. A rule which, incidentally, lacks the status of law."

"That's how all laws start out—as silly little rules. The answer is no, Train. And it's too early in the afternoon to start drinking."

That strategic silence again. I pushed the bottle an inch closer to her hand and smiled a charming androgynous smile.

"Who?" she said, sighing. "And what and why?"

I told her everything but why.

Joseph Alturas' office was in the same Geary Street building as Knowles', one floor higher, a little more distant from the growl of traffic on the street below. A solid old building, carefully built by long-dead hands; praise their skills. It was 4:15. I stood in front of a door, the pebble-glass upper half of which was inscribed in chipped gold leaf: JOSEPH ALTURAS, SR. & JOSEPH ALTURAS, JR., COUNSELORS AT LAW. A fragmented shadow flickered across the glass, grew into the discernible shape of a human head and shoulders, and the door swung open. A woman stood there staring at me, shocked. She had on a coat and hat, a purse and a book in her right hand.

"My name is Sam Train," I said quickly. "I spoke with you—I presume it was you—a couple of hours ago. You're leaving?"

"Why shouldn't I?" she snapped. It hadn't been shock, it had been surprise. She stepped around me into the hall and closed the door, reflexively testing the lock.

She looked between fifty and sixty years old, but who knows any

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more? Maybe forty and seventy. She appraised me with cool grey eyes, looking up from a trim five-six or -seven frame. "Buy me a drink," she said, "and I'll spill the beans."

We slipped into a booth in a bar she selected a few doors up the street, the end-of-the-day rush not on yet. She ordered a double martini, I ordered a beer. She put the book on the table between us and I read the title upside down. Santayana. *The Life of Reason, or The Phases of Human Progress.*

"Heavy," I said. "You've got time to read that kind of stuff at the office?"

"I've got time at the office," she said, "to square the circle—if I knew how to do it. You know how to square the circle?"

"No."

"It's a big problem. You know Joseph?"

"No."

"You want to hire him?"

"No. Just talk to him. Did he check in this afternoon?"

"No. But he checked in this morning. Just long enough to pay part of my back salary. Eleven hundred bucks' worth—a pittance. Cash. Anybody ever owe you five months' back pay, Mr. Train?"

"No, they haven't."

"You know what it does to you? Well, of course you don't. What it does is make you want to quit when you get even a little of it."

"Did you quit? Is that why the early closing?"

"No, but I should have. Listen, I'm a damn good legal secretary. I've been over thirty years at it—I can go to work anywhere in this godforsaken town."

"You said he paid you in cash. What denominations—hundred-dollar bills?"

"Right. How'd you know?" She whipped off her hat, ran fingers through her short-cropped curly greying hair, and said, "He's in trouble, isn't he? What'd he do, stick up a bank? Are you a cop?"

"A private investigator, Miss—?"

"Julia March, and 'Miss' is right, damn it. What'd he do?"

The drinks arrived and she took a big thirsty belt of hers. I said, "How long have you worked for him, Miss March?"

"For him? Him alone? Since his father died five years ago. Before that, twenty-seven years for the last of the honest lawyers, Joe Alturas, Senior."

"Joe Junior isn't honest?"

She grinned at me, half drunk on half a drink, and I said, "Before

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he stopped paying your salary, how did he make his money? Clients?"

"What else? He represented a bunch of those sleaze merchants over on Broadway. Porno kings and princes. Also varlets. Stuff old Joe wouldn't have touched with a cattle prod."

"And then what?"

She smirked. "He did the dirty on them, represented some poor slob from Iowa who got ripped off in a massage parlor. He lost the case, of course, but that scum over there didn't like the heresy and wrote him out of their church. He's lucky they didn't break his legs."

"But he must have inherited a lot of business from his father's day—no?"

"Of course he did. It was a partnership. But there's a small tragedy in all this, Mr. Train—a kid cut and trimmed to fit a mold he wasn't meant for. Big Joe's dream—he and his son as partners—it didn't work, he lost it all."

"Was Ricardo Canelli one of Big Joe's clients?"

"You bet—one of the best. You know Mr. Canelli? Of course you do or you wouldn't have mentioned his name. What about him?" She took a cigarette from her purse, asked for and got my permission to light it, and did so with a battered old Zippo.

"Nothing, Miss March, I haven't known him very long. But I understand Joe drew his will—some time ago."

"No, Joe didn't draw his will!" She was suddenly belligerent, one martini down and another on the way.

"Who did, then?"

"I did, damn it! I got more law in my little pinky than he's got in his whole tubby body!"

"Tubby? Is he fat?"

"In the head, mostly, but yes, he's fat. And he doesn't wash often enough." The thought soured her face. "He's gone to hell."

"Where does he live?"

"I don't know."

"*Please* tell me, Miss March."

"I really *don't* know, Mr. Train."

"Would you tell me if you did know?"

"Ah! A hypothetical question. I love hypothetical questions. Tell me. Do people call you Choo-Choo?"

"Only seven-year-olds."

Her second double martini arrived and I doubted she could survive it.

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Rachel Haas had told me that Alturas had checked with her office every fifteen or twenty minutes from seven o'clock last Monday evening until Canelli's call had come in for him at ten. After that, no more inquiries. Alturas had either kidnapped Candace or killed her, or both. He and Knowles together. And he'd almost certainly killed Knowles—for reasons unknown. A falling out of some kind. Maybe because Knowles had extorted the three grand from the dying man, a few quick bucks that might have spoiled the big ransom play. I didn't know anything for sure, but I had to find Alturas quickly because maybe the girl was still alive. Alturas appeared now as a man whose string was running out, a desperate man.

Miss March's hands and shoulders were coiled around her drink, protective as a mother cat. Did all her days end like this, I wondered. Had she been in love with Joe, Senior, and was she now mourning the crumbling world they'd built? I got out the picture of Candace and placed it on the table before her.

"Do you know her?"

She took reading glasses from her purse and hooked them over her nose. I was watching her closely and saw a kind of pleased wonderment fill her eyes. She looked up, smiling. "I saw her once," she said. "I was sitting right here where I'm sitting now."

"Go on."

"This girl and Joe were seated at the bar over there—about ten feet away. I'd dropped in for a drink—as once in a while I do." Ironic tone.

"Joe was dating her?"

"I don't know. I never saw her before and I haven't seen her since."

"Did Joe introduce you?"

"No. They didn't know I was here. But I kept staring at her, she was so—"

"What?"

"I don't know—*shining*, full of light. I don't know. But I was terrifically pleased for Joe. He needs—well, he needs *something*."

"Where do you think he met her?"

"How would I know? He never tells me a damn thing about anything." She was belligerent again. "In his work, I suppose."

"What was his work then—the Broadway stuff?"

She nodded.

"Where does he live, Julia? I've got to find him."

"I don't know where he lives. I told you. He seems to move every few weeks any more. Believe me, if I knew I'd tell you. I'd *like* you

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to find him. Somebody has to do something." There were tears in her eyes.

At 5:30 I put her in a cab and paid the driver to take her home. She was still crying.

I stood at the curb, bathed in the stormy roar of going-home traffic, wondering what to do next. Then I went back into the bar, all the way to the rear where the phone always is, and looked up James Knowles' home address in the battered book hanging there. It was south of Mission, one of the numbered streets, a mixed kind of neighborhood, mostly in decline. Knowles must have driven the only Corvette within a mile of the place.

Then I took a cab home, got my Dart out of the garage, and went there.

Knowles' apartment, on the second floor of a pre-quake frame building, was neither padlocked nor had a cop on guard. Knowles' murder was only a day and a half old. Beyond a doubt, the cops had combed through his pad for clues but found not enough to leave the place protected. I tried the door. It was locked.

What I wanted most was to find Candace, but if not her, then Alturas. I knocked lightly on the door, stuck my ear against it, mouth open, but heard nothing. I spoke her name loud enough to penetrate the old thin wood, but got no response.

In the trunk of the Dart I keep a lock-pick set and I went back down to get it. At the door in the dim-lit foyer below I did an after-you act with a guy coming in, a beefy six-footer. Courteously, he held the door open for me and I caught a whiff of sweaty armpit. I thanked him and stepped out onto the sidewalk, but held the door in my hand, watching him ascend the stairs to the landing and turn to make the second course.

A belly had pushed at the three-button jacket of his suit. I went back in and followed him up the stairs, pausing at that point where I could see him go to Knowles' door and look around before he stuck a key in the lock and opened it. I was just fast enough to get there and put a foot in the door before it could close.

Rebounding, it swung wide, and when I stepped inside, winded, a gun was looking at me from five or six feet away, a .32, sometimes a lady's gun but not this evening. Alturas was crouched behind it, dark eyes narrowed, mouth wide open, scared enough to kill.

I said, "Look, I'm not a cop. Let's talk. All I want to know is where's Candace."

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He backed away another pace. He said, breath as thin as mine, "Who are you?"

"Canelli hired me this morning to get her back. That's all I want, Joe. That's all *he* wants. If you've got a price, name it. Where is she?"

He backed up some more, his left hand feeling for a chair behind him. Finding it, he dropped like a sack, the gun aquiver, both hands forming a brace to hold it still. He was close to the edge—he looked like he'd been running for years.

"What you need," I said softly, "is a drink. Is there anything in the joint?"

"In the kitchen cupboard over the sink." The gun gave me general directions and I turned my back and went there, found a half pint of rye, and brought it back, tossing it into his lap from a safe distance away.

He was sweating heavily. He uncapped the bottle and drank.

"Joe," I said, "it's not much use. Your prints are all over Knowles' Corvette. They know you're their man. You should be out of town instead of here. How come you're here?"

"Sometimes I crash here, and I've got noplace else at the moment. Besides, one of my law books is here and I need it."

"*How To Escape the Noose,* right?" A foolish jape.

"That's not funny, buster."

"Nothing is, Joe, it's all quiet desperation. Why don't you turn yourself in? It'll make you a point or two, believe me."

"How come *you're* here, pal?"

"I told you—I'm trying to find Candace. Is she dead, Joe?"

"No, she's not dead. She's back where she came from."

"Where's that—North Carolina?"

"No. On the street."

"What street?"

"You don't know her, do you? *Her* street, man—Broadway." He took another long pull of rye, his eyes never leaving mine.

"Where on Broadway?"

"I don't know, I didn't try to find her, it was too late. Maybe Manny Defoe's, where she used to work."

"What's Manny Defoe's?"

"Manny Defoe's Sex Emporium, for God's sake." He looked disgusted, as though I should have known without asking. "He used to be a client of mine. She did a private strip act there. While the meter ticks, she takes her clothes off a piece at a time. You're on

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the other side of the glass and you go crazy." He laughed bitterly and the gun jiggled up and down. "That's where I found her—"

"And then you introduced her to Canelli and he took her away from you."

"I sold her to Canelli for ten grand."

"You're kidding!"

"Why would I kid? Call it a finder's fee. I needed the money."

"And she knew about it? Was she in on it?"

"Hell, no, she wasn't in on it. She was too dumb to be in on it."

"You mean she would have balked—"

He made a weary gesture. "Who knows? She's the dumbest broad I ever saw."

"You mean she didn't know her own value, so you snatched her last Monday. To sell her back to Canelli for what—a million? You wrote his will, you knew she'd have just maintenance money after his death, so you had to strike now, before he died."

"I didn't *snatch* her, man! I told her I'd tell Canelli where I'd found her, what she'd done for a living if she didn't play along. She was right here until Saturday of her own free will. We didn't have her chained, for God's sake!"

"Here with Knowles?"

"Yeah, here with Knowles. But he—"

"What?"

"He got the hots for her, kept putting off delivering the ransom demand, and we had a fight about it. Then he swiped her jewelry and began selling it off for his goddamn car payments." He shook his head, still bewildered by it. "He was a born loser."

"So you had to kill him."

"That's what I had to do—and it wasn't hard at all. Bang, you're dead. And the second time, they tell me, is as easy as another drink." The grin he gave me was wreathed in a sweaty face.

"Maybe, Joe; maybe not. Don't take the chance you're wrong. What about that law book—where is it?"

The gun gestured again. "In the bedroom, unless the cops picked it up."

"You want me to go look?" I was thinking about a window. There must be a window there to go through. This was no man to test—he had no restraints left, nothing left to lose.

"Cute," he said, dry as dust. "We'll both go get it. You lead the way."

He leaned forward to get up, gun pointed down for an instant, and

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I made a long, arced dive at him, like an Olympic swimmer. It halfway worked. I'd knocked the gun from his hand, but I was flat on my face, breathless.

I grabbed an ankle I could reach and pulled it toward me, but then a knee crunched down on the back of my neck and I let go of the ankle and rolled to my left, where there was room, got to my knees, and sprung to my feet in a crouch, arms spread like an ape's, ready to kill or to die.

He'd retrieved the gun and was a yard or two in front of me, backing away again, eyes bleak and staring into space, dealing with something else, the whole clumsy, misguided run of his life. I didn't shout "No!" as he put the gun in his mouth, still backing away, and pulled the trigger, but I turned abruptly at the sight and sound and looked out a window at the dying day; gone west again.

A few minutes later, on Knowles' phone, with a handkerchief around my hand, I called Bill Brady at his home and told him what had happened. He was pleased. With a little sleight of hand he could get a commendation.

I'm not yet comfortable in the Porno Age, and probably never will be. I haven't enjoyed the stuff since it slithered out of the dark and fetid hole where it belongs. It should, if anywhere, be a hard-to-find sideshow in the circus of life.

Manny's Sex Emporium was no surprise: at that hour of the night a neon assault on the eyes, the street itself was an attack on all the senses, and finally the stomach, too.

She had orange hair and Cleopatra's tired old eyes. The soft lumps of her upper body were covered in a pink-satin blouse. I said to her through the grid of the wire screen between us, "Hey, I understand Candy's back on the job." I grinned a slummer's grin, nostalgic for the mud of life.

"Twenty bucks admission," she said, "plus a buck a minute in the viewing room. You know the drill, mister, I can tell from the look on your face."

"Is it Candy?" I said eagerly.

"We got a Candy, we got a Trixie, we got a Sheri—we got what you want."

"Did she just come back to work—Saturday, maybe?"

"How would I know? They come, they go. *I* come, *I* go. Twenty bucks, please."

I paid the twenty and went down a hall to a numbered door and

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stepped into a room, five by five at the most. The inside wall was glass. Beyond it a pretty brunette girl sat on a chair reading a book. She looked up and smiled and put the book down. Some of them are students, I've heard, or housewives moonlighting for a few extra bucks in these hard times. They don't get touched, they just get looked at; it's good clean work, right?

The brunette said, "Hi," tinnily through a speaker, and I returned the greeting and left.

"That's not Candy," I told the frump at the cashier's cage.

"Look," she said, "there's a Candy in every joint on the street. That one's ours."

Two stops and forty bucks later I found her. Same sort of setup, a thick pane of glass between her tiny space and the client's, voices transmitted through a dime-store squawk box. She was wearing a bushy red wig and far too much makeup for that mouth and those eyes. Camouflage. But what flowed through all that guck couldn't easily be dissembled. It came through the glass like a heat wave, her greeting smile so human and true it stopped your breath. Bliss in those painted eyes—that was her promise.

Alturas had found her here a couple of years ago and seen a fortune in those eyes.

She had no book in her lap, just her folded hands. She didn't say "Hi," she said "Hello"—in a soft, tawny voice the cheap equipment couldn't quite kill. The rear wall of her cubicle was made entirely of mirrored glass. She stood up, the two of her, a gangling, girlish move without much grace. Music came wafting through a speaker screen in the ceiling over my head. She began to move to its sultry beat, awkwardly, a thrust of hip, a shift of shoulders, arms and hands waving arrhythmically through the air. She was so bad and so touching and so dear I could have cried.

Her big garish eyes drifted upward from mine and wandered through the air above my head. She seemed encapsulated in those eyes, all by herself there. That was her secret: to hide within her eyes. She tugged at the bow at the throat of her blouse as the music picked up its beat. Show time. I began to sweat, at one with the dozens of guys who'd stood here before me, damp and ashamed. She was terrible—the bow resisted coming undone and what little rapport she'd had with the music vanished. But she was automated, grinding inexorably toward a programmed end. It would have killed me if she'd gotten there, and before the bow finally fell loose I said, "No! Stop it!"

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She didn't seem to hear me and I rapped against the glass until her eyes stopped their aimless flight and met mine again.

"No!" I said, shaking my head. "Stop it! Mrs. Canelli, please stop it!"

Her hands gathered beneath her chin, forearms across her breasts in that classic crouching pose of a woman caught at her bath. Still fully dressed, she was suddenly ashamed of herself. His name had done it. If I'd said Zaleski she'd have gone on dancing. She was surrogate for him; she was ashamed because she thought he would be ashamed. But I knew better. My shame was for myself, as his would have been. He wanted that spirit back in his life, not that flesh, draped or undraped. I doubt that he had known that flesh—just that spirit.

I got out her picture and pressed it against the glass and she smiled at it, as people seem impelled to do. She was looking at her true self and she knew it. Her smile reached me and I said, "Let's get out of here. Right now."

I drove her straight home. She'd taken a room around the corner on Kearny Street, but there was nothing in it she wanted. In the car she took off that awful wig and shook out her natural honey-colored hair.

With a fistful of tissues she wiped her eyes and mouth clean of the guck. But she was nervous and fearful.

"He won't take me back," she said.

"Don't bet on it, Candy."

"Well, then, Mrs. Ganz surely won't."

"Who's Mrs. Ganz—the nurse?"

"Yes. None of them will take me back."

She cuddled herself in the passenger seat of the Dart, staring straight ahead at the night, and I had to command my right arm not to slither out like a snake and offer comfort.

We were there sooner than she wanted to be and I told her to get out and go straight up to the door and ring. She had no key, nor much of anything else left in her purse. At the door she turned and looked beseechingly at me, but I held out the flat of my hand in rejection. Then she rang the bell and waited, hugging herself, until the door swung open under the iron fist of Mrs. Ganz, wide as a wall of whitewashed brick.

For a moment neither she nor Candy moved, and then Mrs. Ganz

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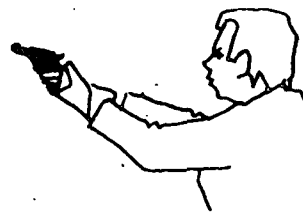
reached out and crushed her like a doll against her giant breast; and I drove quietly away.

A month later, Canelli died. And a month after that I got a letter from a law firm I'd never heard of before. Inside it, accompanied by a brief note, was a plain white envelope addressed to me and marked "Personal." The note said: "In accordance with the expressed wishes of the late Mr. Ricardo Canelli, we herewith forward the enclosed to you."

There was nothing in the envelope but another note, signed in a shaky hand by Ricardo Canelli. It said, simply: "Thank you."

And there I was, ahead of the game for once.



DETECTIVERSE

CONFUCIUS SAY

by RICHARD PETER

Said the flippant young man to benign Charlie Chan,
"Hey, Pop, skip the classic allusion—
When you add quotation to ratiocination,
The result is doubly Confucian."

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THE JURY BOX

by Allen J. Hubin

Possibly the most inventive writer practicing regularly in our field is Peter Dickinson: he can be relied upon to produce work after work of notable originality. Sometimes it isn't so much the plot that's fresh as the approach he takes with it.

This is the case with his latest, *Death of a Unicorn* (Pantheon, $13.95), because when all's said and done nothing so shatteringly new is offered by the basic story line. But attend to the way Dickinson lays it out. We start with ten months in the early 1950s, when Lady Margaret Millett, heiress to the huge and expensive family estate of Cheatle, is just shedding her mother's restraints and coming out into the world. She joins a shaky London society publication, writing mannered little pieces, and she becomes mistress to the mysterious man more than twice her age who comes to own the periodical. Later, after some curious happenings and a death, we come to the present, in which Lady Margaret has become a highly successful romantic novelist and the past intrudes with reminders and suggestions not at all settling to the mistress of Cheatle. Rich, imaginative narrative.

Robin Cook's *Mindbend* (Putnam, $15.95) is a cautionary tale, warning of a threat posed by pharmaceutical companies. Cook certainly believes in his message: his conviction carries the story along and the book will likely sell very well. But I wish his style were more fluid and the drug conspiracy he describes a little less out of James Bond.

Adam Schonberg is struggling through medical school in New York without help from his famous doctor father, who neurotically blames Adam for family tragedies not of his doing. When Adam's wife becomes pregnant, he has to drop out of school. He takes a job with Arolen Pharmaceuticals, and quickly becomes aware of the firm's remarkable ability to persuade doctors to prescribe its products, to leave private practice and join the Julian Clinic, also under the Arolen corporate umbrella. And why does the clinic have such an abiding interest in fetal tissue?

Lee Martin, formerly a policewoman and now a Ph.D. candidate and instructor at the University of Houston, offers a strong and winsome debut in *Too Sane a Murder* (St. Martin's, $12.95). When a houseful of people is cut down with a shotgun, and a survivor is a fellow who has been under psychiatric care since childhood, has been diagnosed as schizophrenic, has had violent outbursts—the case is as well as solved. But Deb Ralston, Fort Worth police detective, wife, and mother, looks beyond the obvious and comes to believe it isn't so. Trying to destroy a solved case is not popular with the legal estab-

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lishment, but try she does. We must see more of this marvelous lady!

Another goodly first novel is *And Then They Die* (St. Martin's, $12.95) by Robert McCollum. Francesca Mills was a New York reporter who endured—barely—the indignity of a cystectomy, and fled for a fresh start to a small town in Texas and bought its newspaper. But now beset by attacks of unbearable pain, she's sure cancer has reappeared. While this battle to live, even half normally, is going on, others are dying: a wealthy widow, of a broken neck; a charismatic Catholic, the dead woman's priest, of a shotgun blast. Somewhere in the first victim's family is a secret worth killing for: is it killing for greed, or killing for fear, or killing for political ambition? Francesca, with police chief Blackie Boone, will find it out. Sensitive narrative.

The previous Professor Shandy novels by Charlotte MacLeod have been gems of criminous humor. The latest, *The Curse of the Giant Hogweed* (Doubleday, $11.95), is the most creative of all, but may as a consequence appeal to more specialized tastes. Taking a page from John Dickson Carr and some of his historical mysteries, MacLeod transports Shandy and two colleagues through a door in Wales into a medieval landscape strewn with knights and ladies, deadly dangers, witches, unrequited love, griffins, the odd anachronism, a murder plot, and other merry doings. The academic trio has crossed the Atlantic to help stamp out the rampaging hogweed, little dreaming where the solution to that dire peril will lie. A droll delight.

The sixth of William F. Buckley, Jr.'s espionage novels featuring Blackford Oakes is *See You Later, Alligator* (Doubleday, $16.95). Buckley uses these tales, set in the past and offering enjoyable elegance of expression, to comment and speculate on historical events and persons. Here it's 1962, and Che Guevara has trolled a bit of bait in front of President Kennedy. Oakes is dispatched to Cuba to inspect said bait, and spends months in laborious dialogue, falling into bed with a willing translator in his spare time and wondering what all this is about. What it's about is a little private initiative on Guevara's part, plus Castro's desire to keep the U.S. pacified while the busy red gremlins from Moscow erect some 40 nuclear-armed missiles on Cuban soil. Provocative and fascinating portrayal, especially of Guevara.

I've come to expect much from Britain's B. M. Gill, and *The Twelfth Juror* (Scribners, $11.95) doesn't disappoint: it's an impressive piece of novelcraft, of stage-setting, and rug-pulling. TV personality Edward Carne, on trial for the murder of his wife, is curiously uncooperative with his own counsel. His daughter, who might give key testimony, has disappeared. The jurors are the expected mixed bag. When the case is put to them, they squabble and sort themselves into shifting sides. And one of their number has an undeclared relationship of the highest relevance.

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a Henry Turnbuckle story by

JACK RITCHIE

In the June 1984 issue, we published the last story Jack Ritchie wrote before his death in April 1983, a Henry Turnbuckle story titled "The Two Percent Solution." The following Henry Turnbuckle story was the featured Mini Mystery in the June 7, 1983 issue of Woman's World *and we're grateful for permission to reprint it in EQMM for those who missed that issue of that delightful magazine . . .*

DIAL AN ALIBI

by JACK RITCHIE

"Ralph," I said darkly, "I have always been suspicious when a very rich man has apparently taken his own life."

"Why, Henry?"

I smiled grimly. "Suspicion is my business."

Nevertheless, everything seemed to be in order.

Orville Tucker, a man in his middle sixties, had been found dead on the sofa in his study at three P.M. by his housekeeper-cook, Mrs. Brewster, when she entered the room to wake him from his afternoon nap.

Tucker had a single bullet wound in his head. Beside him lay a .32-caliber revolver. Apparently, no one in the house heard the shot.

Tucker's fingerprints had been found on the gun and in his left hand he clutched a paper upon which were typed the words, "Ask Adrienne 563–2704."

I dialed the number and found that I was talking to the United Trouble Hot Line—a service to help people in trouble. Adrienne was not on duty at the moment but would be in at seven that evening.

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I immediately dispatched a uniformed officer to her apartment with orders to bring her to the Tucker residence.

Ralph and I then questioned Mrs. Brewster.

"Mrs. Brewster," I asked, "do you know of any reason why Mr. Tucker might have wanted to take his own life?"

She was a large-jawed woman in her mid-fifties. "Well, he wasn't feeling too good. He had to be careful of what he ate."

"How long have you been employed by Mr. Tucker?"

"Twenty-five years, give or take a little."

"Would you happen to know who Mr. Tucker's heirs are?"

"As far as I know, there's only one. Miss Beatrice, his niece."

"Are you by any chance mentioned in Mr. Tucker's will?"

"He told me I was."

"To what extent?"

"Fifty thousand dollars, for loyal and faithful service."

I took Ralph out of earshot. "Ralph, fifty thousand dollars is a powerful motive for murder. She could have sneaked into Tucker's den during his nap. Then, acting swiftly, she could have pressed the gun into his limp hand, forcing his finger to pull the trigger."

"What about the note, Henry?"

"Ah, yes. Why wasn't it signed?"

"Now, Henry, it wasn't exactly a suicide note, was it? Just a name and a telephone number. Why should he sign something like that?"

When Tucker's niece, Beatrice, arrived she was accompanied by a tall, somewhat shifty-eyed man.

"This is Clarence Kennicott," she said, introducing her escort.

He nodded confirmation and patted her hand.

I dislike people who pat hands and decided to incorporate him into my open-ended list of suspects.

I commenced the questioning. "Do you have any idea why your uncle might have committed suicide?"

"Well, he was in rather poor health. Didn't he leave a note or something?"

"In a way," Ralph said enigmatically. "You are your uncle's sole heir?"

"As far as I know."

Kennicott amended that. "Except for a hundred-thousand-dollar bequest to Dr. Rathbourne and fifty thousand to Mrs. Brewster, everything goes to Beatrice."

I regarded him narrowly. "How do you happen to know that?"

"I am Orville Tucker's executor."

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Ralph drew me out of earshot again. "Well, Henry, what do you think?"

"Ralph," I said, "I am a keen judge of character. That woman could not possibly have shot her uncle."

"Why not?"

"She simply isn't the type. But take that Kennicott. He has the look of an assassin."

"For shame, Henry. You can't judge a book by its cover."

"Perhaps not, Ralph, but notice the way he fawns over Beatrice Tucker. I wouldn't be surprised if he has the fantastic idea that she will marry him as soon as the dust settles and he will be in a position to share her inheritance."

A uniformed officer now entered the room with a raven-haired woman in her twenties.

"Aha," I said. "You are Adrienne?"

She nodded. "And you are Detective-Sergeant Henry S. Turnbuckle."

I had Adrienne McCullum tell her story.

"Well, Mr. Tucker phoned me three times last week at the hot line. Only I didn't know he was Mr. Tucker then, because he wouldn't give me his last name, just his first."

She decided to give me some background. "I work at the hot line three hours every weeknight. For charitable reasons and for my Ph.D. thesis."

"Why was Tucker calling the hot line?"

"His health, or the lack of it. He was depressed and threatened to commit suicide, but I always managed to talk him out of it. At least until today. I repeatedly tried to get his full name so that I could get help to him, but he refused to give it."

"Did he specifically ask to speak to you?"

"Not the first time. I just happened to be on duty on that line. However, after that first session he would speak only to me."

Dr. Rathbourne arrived. He proved to be a rotund man of late middle age. He nodded to both Kennicott and Beatrice Tucker and asked me, "Orville committed suicide?"

"So it would appear. For the moment, at least. Can you tell me the general condition of Orville Tucker's health?"

Dr. Rathbourne replied with a shrug. "He had plenty of things wrong with him and he wasn't getting any younger, but he could easily have lived another ten or fifteen years."

I smiled significantly. "You are mentioned in Tucker's will?"

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"Yes. He told me that he intended to leave me a hundred thousand. We've been friends since we were kids."

"Where were you between two and three this afternoon?"

He hesitated. "I was in my office. My receptionist and a half dozen patients could verify that."

"When did you see Tucker last?"

"Thursday evening. I dropped in and we played some chess."

I addressed Adrienne. "Was Tucker's health all that he talked about?"

"Mostly. He complained about his liver, kidneys, stomach, and arthritis."

Dr. Rathbourne frowned. "Are you positive about that? Tucker didn't have arthritis."

She thought it over. "Well, come to think of it he mentioned arthritis only once." Now she, too, frowned and asked, "You came here Thursday evening and played chess with Tucker?"

"Yes."

"Did he leave at about eight o'clock and remain away for fifteen or twenty minutes?"

"No. We sat down about seven-thirty and played steadily until almost ten."

"Aha," Adrienne said triumphantly. "Then *who* made the phone call to me at the hot line at eight o'clock Thursday evening? If it wasn't Tucker Thursday night, then it certainly wasn't Tucker all the other nights, because it was the same voice."

Dr. Rathbourne rubbed his jaw. "Then this person pretending to be Tucker got careless and accidentally included his own arthritis when dwelling on Tucker's illnesses."

I had been on the *verge* of pointing that out.

Dr. Rathbourne frowned at Kennicott. "*You* have arthritis, Clarence," he said.

I expected Kennicott to point out that millions of people have arthritis, but he just shrugged.

Beatrice Tucker blinked. "What possible reason could Clarence have for killing Uncle Orville?"

I opened my mouth to speak, but Dr. Rathbourne got there first. "I've heard rumors that Clarence is deeply in debt. Frankly, I think he murdered your uncle because he's got the wild idea that he will succeed in marrying you and sharing your estate."

Beatrice Tucker stared at Kennicott. "Good heavens, Clarence! I would *never* marry a man who keeps patting my hand."

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Adrienne zeroed in on Kennicott. "You never thought that there was a ghost of a chance that you would have to talk to me on the phone again, much less actually see me in person. I can imagine your surprise when I walked into the room."

She said smiling grimly, "No wonder I haven't heard you say a word since I came in. Say something. Anything. If you're the person who made those phone calls I'll recognize your voice."

Kennicott glared at all of us and then whipped a pen and notebook from his pocket. He scribbled on a page, tore it out, and handed it to me.

It read, "I refuse to say anything until I've seen my lawyer."

Well, that did it. Among all of them they had greedily solved the case. At the moment it wasn't airtight, of course. However, now that we had a target, so to speak, we would undoubtedly dig up solid evidence.

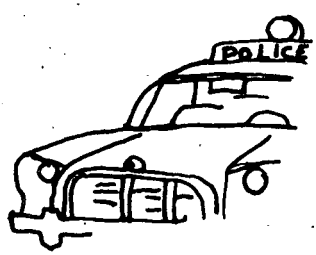
Nevertheless my mood was far from euphoric. I sighed. "Ralph, why is life so short and the days so long?"

"Now, Henry," Ralph said. "Don't brood. You guessed that it was Kennicott from the beginning."

"Ralph, guessing and *deducing* are not the same thing. I would have preferred to deduce." I stared at all of them and continued, "Without interference."

"Sure, Henry. You were just outnumbered. It took all of them to solve the case."

Outnumbered? I brightened a bit. Well, yes, there *was* that. If I had been given just a little more time, I would *certainly* have solved the case in short order.



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a ***NEW*** short story by

RUTH RENDELL

Of the four clocks, Trixie's favorite was blue, with a green trellis over the blue, a convolvulus plant with green leaves and pale-pink trumpet flowers climbing the trellis, and a gilt rim 'round the face of the clock, which had hands of gilt and blue.

Publishers Weekly *said of Ruth Rendell's latest novel,* Tree of Hands, *published by Pantheon, a Mystery Guild main selection and both a Literary Guild and Doubleday Book Club alternate: "This is a major triumph for the British author, whose works have never been less than excellent . . ."*

THE CONVOLVULUS CLOCK

by RUTH RENDELL

"Is that your own hair, dear?"

Sibyl only laughed. She made a roguish face.

"I didn't think it could be," said Trixie. "It looks so thick."

"A woman came up to me in the street the other day," said Sibyl, "and asked me where I had my hair set. I just looked at her. I gave a tiny little tip to my wig like this. You should have seen her face."

She gave another roar of laughter. Trixie smiled austerely. She had come to stay with Sibyl for a week and this was her first evening. Sibyl had bought a cottage in Devonshire. It was two years since Trixie had seen Sibyl and she could detect signs of deterioration. What a pity that was! Sibyl inquired after the welfare of the friends they had in common. How was Mivvy? Did Trixie see anything of the Fishers? How was Poppy?

"Poppy is beginning to go a bit funny," said Trixie.

"How do you mean, funny?"

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"You know. Funny. Not quite *compos mentis* any more."

Sibyl of all people ought to know what going funny meant, thought Trixie.

"We're none of us getting any younger," said Sibyl, laughing.

Trixie didn't sleep very well. She got up at five and had her bath so as to leave the bathroom clear for Sibyl. At seven she took Sibyl a cup of tea. She gave a little scream and nearly dropped the tray.

"Oh, my conscience! I'm sorry, dear, but I thought that was a squirrel on your chest of drawers. I thought it must have come in through the window."

"What on earth was that noise in the middle of the night?" When Sibyl wasn't laughing she could be downright peevish. She looked a hundred without her wig. "It woke me up—I thought the tank was overflowing."

"The middle of the night! I like that! The sun had been up a good hour, I'm sure. I was just having my bath so as not to be a nuisance."

They went out in Sibyl's car. They had lunch in Dawlish and tea in Exmouth. The following day they went out early and drove across Dartmoor. When they got back there was a letter on the mat for Trixie from Mivvy, though Trixie had only been away two days. On Friday Sibyl said they would stay at home and have a potter about the village. The church was famous—the Manor House gardens were open to the public and there was an interesting small gallery where an exhibition was on. She started to get the car out but Trixie said why couldn't they walk, it could hardly be more than a mile. Sibyl said it was just under two miles but she agreed to walk if Trixie really wanted to. Her knee hadn't been troubling her quite so much lately.

"The gallery is called Artifacts," said Sibyl. "It's run by a very nice young couple."

"A husband-and-wife team?" asked Trixie, very modern.

"Jimmy and Judy they're called. I don't think they are actually married."

"Oh, my conscience, Sibyl, how can one be 'actually' married? Surely one is either married or not?" Trixie herself had been married once, long ago, for a short time. Sibyl had never been married and neither had Mivvy or Poppy. Trixie thought that might have something to do with their going funny. "Thankfully, I'm broad-minded. I shan't say anything. I think I can see a seat ahead in that bus shelter. Would you like a little sit-down before we go on?"

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Sibyl got her breath back and they walked on more slowly. The road passed between high hedges on high banks dense with wild flowers. It crossed a stream by a hump-backed bridge, where the clear brown shallow water rippled over a bed of stones. The church appeared with granite nave and tower, standing on an eminence and approached, Sibyl said, by fifty-three steps. Perhaps they should go to Artifacts first?

The gallery was housed in an ancient building with bow windows and a front door set under a Georgian portico. When the door was pushed open, a bell tinkled to summon Jimmy or Judy. This morning, however, they needed no summoning for both were in the first room, Judy dusting the dollhouse and Jimmy doing something to the ceiling spotlights. Sibyl introduced Trixie to them and Trixie was very gracious towards Judy, making no difference in her manner than she would have if the young woman had been properly married and worn a wedding ring.

Trixie was agreeably surprised by the objects in the exhibition and by the items Jimmy and Judy had for sale. She had not expected such a high standard. What she admired most particularly were the small pictures of domestic interiors done in embroidery, the patchwork quilts, and the blown-glass vases in colors of mother-of-pearl and butterfly wings. What she liked best of all and wanted to have was a clock.

There were four of these clocks, all different. The cases were ceramic, plain and smooth or made in a trelliswork, glazed in blues and greens, painted with flowers or the moon and stars, each incorporating a gilt-rimmed face and quartz movement. Trixie's favorite was blue, with a green trellis over the blue, a convolvulus plant with green leaves and pale-pink trumpet flowers climbing the trellis, and a gilt rim 'round the face of the clock, which had hands of gilt and blue.

The convolvulus reminded her of the pattern on her best china tea service. All the clocks had price cards beside them and red discs stuck to the cards.

"I should like to buy this clock," Trixie said to Judy.

"I'm terribly sorry but it's sold."

"Sold?"

"All the clocks were sold at the private view. Roland Elm's work is tremendously popular. He can't make enough of these clocks and he refuses to take orders."

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"I still don't understand why I can't buy this one," said Trixie. "This is a shop, isn't it?"

Sibyl had put on her peevish look. "You can see the red sticker, can't you? You know what that means."

"I know what it means at the Royal Academy but hardly here surely."

"I really do wish I could sell it to you," said Judy, "but I can't."

Trixie lifted her shoulders. She was very disappointed and wished she hadn't come. She had been going to buy Sibyl a pear carved from polished pearwood but now she thought better of it. The church also was a letdown—dark, poky, and smelling of mold.

"Things have come to a pretty pass when shopkeepers won't sell their goods to you because they're upset by your manner."

"Judy wasn't upset by your manner," said Sibyl, puffing. "It's more than her reputation is worth to sell you something she's already sold."

"Reputation! I like that!"

"I mean reputation as a gallery owner. Artifacts is quite highly regarded 'round here."

"You would have thought she and her—well, partner—would be glad of sixty-two pounds. I don't suppose they have two halfpennies to bless themselves with."

What Sibyl would have thought was never known, for she was too out of breath to utter and when they got home had to lie down.

Next morning, another letter came from Mivvy.

"Nothing to say for herself, of course," said Trixie at breakfast. "Practically a carbon copy of Thursday's. She's going very funny. Do you know she told me sometimes she writes fifty letters in a week? God bless your pocket, I said, it's fortunate you can afford it."

They went to Princetown in Sibyl's car and Widecombe-in-the-Moor. Trixie sent postcards to Mivvy, Poppy, the Fishers, and the woman who came in to clean and water the plants in the greenhouse. She would have to buy some sort of present for Sibyl before she left. A plant would have done, only Sibyl didn't like gardening. They went to a bird sanctuary and looked at some standing stones of great antiquity. Trixie was going home on Tuesday afternoon.

On Tuesday morning, another letter arrived from Mivvy all about the Fishers going to see the Queen Mother open a new arts center in Leighton Buzzard. The Fishers were crazy about the Queen Mother, watched for her engagements in advance, and went wher-

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ever she went within a radius of 150 miles in order just to catch a glimpse of her. Once they had been at the front of the crowd and the Queen Mother had shaken hands with Dorothy Fisher.

"We're none of us getting any younger," said Sibyl, giggling.

"Well, my conscience, I know one thing," said Trixie. "The days have simply flown past while I've been here."

"I'm glad you've enjoyed yourself."

"Oh, I have, dear—only it would please me to see you a little less frail."

Trixie walked to the village on her own. Since she couldn't think of anything else, she was going to have to buy the pearwood pear for Sibyl. It was a warm sunny morning, one of the best days she'd had, and the front door of Artifacts stood open to the street. The exhibition was still on and the clocks (and their red "sold" discs) still there. A shaft of sunlight streamed across the patchwork quilts onto the Georgian dollhouse. There was no sign of Jimmy and Judy. The gallery was empty but for herself.

Trixie closed the door and opened it to make the bell ring. She picked up one of the pearwood pears and held it out in front of her on the palm of her hand. She held it at arm's length the way she did when she had helped herself to an item in the supermarket just so there couldn't be the slightest question of anyone suspecting her of shoplifting. No one came. Trixie climbed the stairs, holding the pearwood pear out in front of her and clearing her throat to attract attention. There was no one upstairs. A blue Persian cat lay sleeping on a shelf between a ginger jar and a mug with an owl on it. Trixie descended. She closed the front door and opened it to make the bell ring. Jimmy and Judy must be a heedless pair, she thought. Anyone could walk in here and steal the lot.

Of course, she could just take the pearwood pear and leave a five-pound note to pay for it. It cost four pounds seventy-five. But why should she make Jimmy and Judy a present of twenty-five pee just because they were too idle to serve her? Then she remembered that when she had been here with Sibyl a door at the end of the passage had been open, and through that door one could see the garden where there was a display of terra-cotta pots. It was probable Jimmy and Judy were out there, showing the pots to a customer.

Trixie went through the second room and down the passage. The door to the garden was just ajar and she pushed it open. On the lawn, in a cane chair, Judy lay fast asleep. A ledger had fallen off

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her lap and lay on the grass alongside a heap of books. Guides to the management of tax they were and some which looked like the gallery account-books. It reminded Trixie of Poppy, who was always falling asleep in the daytime—most embarrassingly sometimes, at the table or even while waiting for a bus. Judy had fallen asleep over her bookkeeping. Trixie coughed. She said "Excuse me" very loudly and repeated it, but Judy didn't stir.

What a way to run a business! It would serve them right if someone walked in and cleared their shop. It would teach them a lesson. Trixie pulled the door closed behind her. She found herself tiptoeing as she walked back along the passage and through the second room. In the first room she took the ceramic clock with the convolvulus on it off the shelf and put it into her bag and she took the card with the red sticker on it, too, so as not to attract attention to the clock's absence. The pearwood pear she replaced among the other carved fruit.

The street outside seemed deserted. Trixie's heart was beating rather fast. She went across the road into the little newsagent's and gift shop and bought Sibyl a teacloth with a map of Devonshire on it. At the door, as she was coming out again, she saw Jimmy coming along the street towards the gallery with a bag of groceries under one arm and two pints of milk nestled in the other. Trixie stayed where she was until he had gone into Artifacts.

She didn't much fancy the walk back but there was no help for it. When she got to the bridge over the stream, she heard hooves behind her and for a second or two had a feeling she was pursued by men on horseback—but it was only a girl who passed her, riding a fat white pony.

Sibyl laughed when she saw the teacloth and said it was a funny thing to give someone who *lived* in Devonshire. Trixie felt nervous and couldn't eat her lunch. Jimmy and Judy would have missed the clock by now and the newsagent would have remembered a furtive-looking woman skulking in his doorway and described her to them and soon the police would come. If only Sibyl would hurry with the car! She moved so slowly time had no meaning for her. At this rate, Trixie wouldn't even catch her train at Exeter.

She did catch it—just. Sibyl's car had been followed for several miles of the way by police in a Rover with a blue lamp on top and Trixie's heart had been in her mouth. Why had she done it? What had possessed her to take something she hadn't paid for, she who

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when shopping in supermarkets held seventeen-pee pots of yogurt at arm's length?

Now she was safely in the train rushing towards Paddington, she began to see things in a different light. She would have paid for that clock if they had let her. What did they expect if they refused to sell things they had on sale? And what *could* they expect if they went to sleep leaving their shop unattended?

For a few moments she had a nasty little qualm that the police might be waiting for her outside her own door but they weren't. Inside all was as it should be, all was as she had left it except that Poppy had put a pint of milk in the fridge and someone had arranged dahlias in a vase. Not Poppy—she wouldn't know a dahlia from a runner bean.

That would be just the place for the clock, on the wall bracket where at present stood a photograph of herself and Dorothy Fisher at Broadstairs in 1949. Trixie put the photograph away in a drawer and the clock where the photograph had been. It looked nice. It transformed a rather dull corner of the room. Trixie put one of the cups from her tea service beside it and it was amazing how well they matched.

Mivvy came 'round first thing in the morning. Before letting her in, Trixie quickly snatched the clock off the shelf and thrust it inside the drawer with the photograph. It seemed so *exposed* up there—it seemed to tell its history in every tiny tick.

"How did you find Sibyl?"

Trixie wanted to say, I went in the train to Exeter and got out at the station and there was Sibyl waiting for me in her car. Only if you started mocking poor Mivvy where would you end? "Very frail, I thought she was going a bit funny."

"I must drop her a line." Mivvy always spoke as if her letters held curative properties. Receiving one of them would set you up for the winter.

After she had gone, Trixie considered replacing the clock on the shelf but thought better of it. Let it stay in the drawer for a bit. She had read of South American millionaires who have Old Masters stolen for them which they can never show but are obliged, for fear of discovery, to keep hidden away forever in dark vaults.

Just before Christmas a letter came from Sibyl. They always sent each other Christmas letters. As Trixie said, if you can't get around

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to writing the rest of the year, at least you can at Christmas. Mivvy wrote hundreds. Sibyl didn't mention the theft of the clock or indeed mention the gallery at all. Trixie wondered why not. The clock was still in the drawer. Sometimes she lay awake in the night thinking about it, fancying she could hear its tick through the solid mahogany of the drawer, through the ceiling and the bedroom floorboards.

It was curious how she had taken a dislike to the convolvulus tea service. One day she found herself wrapping it in tissue paper and putting it away in the cupboard under the stairs. She took down all the trelliswork 'round the front door and put up wires for the clematis instead. In March she wrote to Sibyl to inquire if there was a new exhibition on at Artifacts. Sibyl didn't answer for weeks. When she did, she told Trixie that months and months back one of those ceramic clocks had been stolen from the gallery and a few days later an embroidered picture had also gone and furniture out of the dollhouse. Hadn't Sibyl mentioned it before? She thought she had but she was getting so forgetful these days.

Trixie took the clock out of the drawer and put it on the shelf. Because she knew she couldn't be found out, she began to feel she hadn't done anything wrong. The Fishers were bringing Poppy 'round for a cup of tea. Trixie started unpacking the convolvulus tea service.

But she lost her nerve when she heard Gordon Fisher's car door slam and she put the clock away again. If she were caught now she might get blamed for the theft of the picture and the dollhouse furniture as well. They would say she had sold those things, and how could she prove she hadn't?

Poppy fell asleep halfway through her second buttered scone.

"She gets funnier every time I see her," Trixie said. "Sad, really. Sibyl's breaking up, too. She'll forget her own name next. You should see her letters. I'll just show you the last one." Then she remembered she couldn't do that, it wouldn't be wise, so she had to pretend she'd mislaid it.

"Will you be going down there again this year, dear?" said Dorothy.

"Oh, I expect so. You know how it is, you get to the stage of thinking it may be the last time."

Poppy woke up with a snort, said she hadn't been asleep, and finished her scone.

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Gordon asked Trixie, "Would you like to come with us and see Her Majesty open the new leisure complex in Rayleigh on Monday?"

Trixie declined. The Fishers went off to do their shopping, leaving Poppy behind. She was asleep again. She slept till six and, waking, asked Trixie if she had put something in her tea. It was most unusual, she said, for her to nod off like that. Trixie walked her back to the bus stop because the traffic whipped along there so fast you had to have your wits about you and drivers didn't respect zebra crossings the way they used to. Trixie marched across on the stripes, confident as a lollipop lady but without the lollipop, taking her life in her hands instead.

She wrote to Sibyl that she would come to Devonshire at the end of July, thinking that while there it might be best to make some excuse to avoid going near Artifacts. The clock was still in the drawer but wrapped up now in a piece of old flannel. Trixie had taken a dislike to seeing the color of it each time she opened the drawer. She had a summer dress that color and she wondered why she had ever bought it—it didn't flatter her, whatever it might do for the Queen Mother. Dorothy could have it for her next jumble sale.

Walking back from posting a letter, Mivvy fell over and broke her ankle. It was weeks getting back to normal. Well, you had to face it, it was never going to be *normal.* You wouldn't be exaggerating, Trixie wrote to Sibyl, if you said that obsession of hers for writing letters had crippled her for life. Sibyl wrote back to say she was looking forward to the last week of July and what did Trixie think had happened? They had caught the thief of the pieces from Artifacts trying to sell the picture to a dealer in Plymouth! He had said in court he hadn't taken the clock but you could imagine how much credence the magistrate placed on that!

Trixie unwrapped the clock and put it on the shelf. Next day she got the china out. She wondered why she had been so precipitate in pulling all that trellis off the wall—it looked a lot better than strands of wire on metal hooks.

Mivvy came round in a taxi, hobbling up the path on two sticks, refusing the offer of the taxi driver's arm. "You'll be off to Sibyl's in a day or two, will you, dear?"

Trixie didn't know how many times she had told her not till Monday week. She was waiting for Mivvy to notice the clock but at this rate she was going to have to wait till Christmas.

"What do you think of my clock?"

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"What, up there? Isn't that your Wedgwood coffee pot, dear?"

Trixie had to get it down. She thrust it under Mivvy's nose and started explaining what it was.

But Mivvy knew already. "Of course I know it's a clock, dear. It's not the first time I've seen one of these. Oh my goodness, no. The young man who makes these, he's a friend of my nephew Tony. They were at art school together. Let me see, what's his name? It will come to me in a minute. A tree, isn't it? Oak? Ash? Peter Oak? No, Elm is his name. Something Elm. Roland Elm."

Trixie said nothing. The glazed surface of the clock felt very cold against the skin of her hands.

"He never makes them to order, you know. He just makes a limited number for a few selected galleries. Tony told me that. Where did you get yours, I wonder?"

Trixie said nothing. There was worse coming and she waited for it.

"Not around here, I'm sure. I know there are only two or three places in the country they go to. It will come to me in a minute. I shall be writing to Tony tomorrow and I'll mention about you having one of Richard's—no, I mean Raymond's, that is, Roland's, clocks. I always write to him on Tuesdays. Tuesday is his day. I'll mention you've got one with bindweed on it. They're all different, you know. He never makes two alike."

"It's convolvulus, not bindweed," said Trixie. "I'd rather you didn't write to Tony about it if you don't mind."

"Oh, but I'd like to mention it, dear. Whyever not? I won't mention your name if you don't want me to. I'll just say that lady who goes down to stay with Auntie Sibyl in Devonshire."

Trixie said she would walk with Mivvy up to the High Street. It was hopeless trying to get a taxi outside here. She fetched Mivvy's two sticks. "You take my arm and I'll hold your other stick."

The traffic whipped along over the zebra crossing. You were at the mercy of those drivers, Trixie said, it was a matter of waiting till they condescended to stop. "Don't you set foot on those stripes till they stop," she said to Mivvy.

Mivvy didn't, so the cars didn't stop. A container lorry, a juggernaut, came thundering along, but a good way off still. Trixie thought it was going much too fast.

"Now if we're quick," she said. "Run for it!"

Startled by the urgency in her voice, Mivvy obeyed, or tried to

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obey, as Trixie dropped her arm and gave her a little push forward. The lorry's brakes screamed like people being tortured and Trixie jumped back, screaming herself, covering her face with her hands so as not to see Mivvy under those giant wheels.

Dorothy Fisher said she quite understood Trixie would still want to go to Sibyl's for her holiday. It was the best thing in the world for her—a rest, a complete change, a chance to forget.

Trixie went down by train on the day after the funeral. She had the clock in her bag with her, wrapped first in tissue paper and then in her sky-blue dress. The first opportunity that offered itself she would take the clock back to Artifacts and replace it on the shelf she had taken it from. This shouldn't be too difficult. The clock was a dangerous possession, she could see that, like one of those notorious diamonds that carry a curse with them. Pretty though it was, it was an *unlucky* clock that had involved her in trouble from the time she had first taken it.

There was no question of walking to Artifacts this time. Sibyl was too frail for that. She had gone downhill a lot since last year, and symptomatic of her deterioration was her exchange of the grey wig for a lilac-blue one. They went in the car, though Trixie was by no means sure Sibyl was safe at the wheel.

As soon as they walked into the gallery, Trixie saw that she had no hope of replacing the clock without being spotted. There was a desk in the first room now, with a plump smiling lady sitting at it that Sibyl said was Judy's mother. Trixie thought that amazing—a mother not minding her daughter cohabiting with a man she wasn't married to. Living with a daughter living in sin, you might put it. Jimmy was in the second room, up on a ladder doing something to the window catch.

"They're having upstairs remodeled," said Sibyl. "You can't go up there." And when Trixie tried to make her way towards the garden door, "You don't want to be had up for trespassing, do you?" She winked at Judy's mother. "We're none of us getting any younger when all's said and done, are we?"

They went back to Sibyl's, the clock still in Trixie's bag. It seemed to have grown heavier. She could hear it ticking through the leather and the folds of the sky-blue dress. In the afternoon when Sibyl lay down on the sofa for her rest, the lilac wig stuck on top of a Poole pottery vase, Trixie went out for a walk, taking the clock with her.

She came to the hump-backed bridge over the stream where the

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water was very low, for it had been a dry summer. She unwrapped the clock and dropped it over the low parapet into the water. It cracked, but the trelliswork and the convolvulus remained intact and the movement continued to move and to tick as well, for all Trixie knew. The blue and green, the pink flowers and the gilt gleamed through the water like some exotic iridescent shell.

Trixie went down the bank. She took off her shoes and waded into the water. It was surprisingly cold. She picked up a large flat stone and beat at the face of the clock with it. She beat with unrestrained fury, gasping and grunting at each blow. The green trellis and the blue sky, the glass face and the pink flowers, all shattered. But they were still there, bright jewellike shards, for all to see who came this way across the bridge.

Squatting down, Trixie scooped up handfuls of pebbles and buried the pieces of clock under them. With her nails, she dug a pit in the bed of the stream and pushed the colored fragments into it, covering them with pebbles. Her hands were bleeding, her knees were bruised, and her dress was wet. In spite of her efforts, the bed of the stream was still spread with ceramic chips and broken glass and pieces of gilt metal. Trixie began to sob and crawl from side to side of the stream, ploughing her hands through the blue and green and gold gravel, and it was there that one of Sibyl's neighbors found her as he was driving home over the bridge.

He lifted her up and carried her to his car.

"Tick-tock," said Trixie. "Tick-tock. Convolvulus clock."

CRIMINALIMERICK

HEAR! HEAR!

By D. R. BENSEN

Since Beowulf tangled with Grendel,
We've seen that the fictional trend'll
Be menace and fear;
And at that stuff no peer
Can be readily found for Ruth Rendell.

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a *NEW* Maynard Bullock story by

JAMES POWELL

"Gentlemen," Count Crispi of CIAO, as the Italian Intelligence service is known, burst in emotionally. "Blunderers or not, these people are our companions-at-arms. Take young Matteo, my representative on the bus. Certainly he's a lazy sports-mad lout. But I don't doubt he would cheerfully give his life for Italy provided he wasn't asked during the World Cup match."

James Powell at the very top of his form here, with as lovable a busload of dunderheads as we ever hoped to see. Frau Koehler may be our favorite—with the exception of a certain always alert Mountie, of course . . .

THE DUNDERHEAD BUS

by JAMES POWELL

When heads of state convene amid pomp and television cameras, their Intelligence chiefs gather, too. A trumpet fanfare opened the recent Sintra summit in the Grand Hall of Portugal's lofty Palacio da Pena. The sound wandered the palace's mock medieval corridors and noble staircases until, a dim brass echo, it arrived at the sumptuous blue-tiled room beneath whose vaulted ceiling the spy masters of the world sat at cards.

As usual, the conversation was guarded during the first few hands. But it turned frisky as the whiskey flowed and as usual the laughter and needling focused on the latest exploits of the dunderheads. Each service had its share of incompetents—operatives who could not be dismissed without making their superiors look like fools for having tolerated them so long. And since no service would knowingly kill one of its rivals' bunglers, the dense could sometimes grow thick

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enough to require a joint action—like the Ferris-wheel disaster at the Venice World's Fair in 1910—to thin them out.

Tonight the Dane suggested joint-action time had come again. The Russian seconded the motion, offering his Comrade Petrovna, Seductress Third Class, she of the chronic wink, who always fell utterly in love with anyone she was sent to charm. The Austrian enrolled gentlemanly Arthur Frobish—too polite to pry, Frobish had not really found a home for himself in espionage. The East German contributed Frau Koehler, who, in any disguise, clicked her heels and bowed from the neck when introducing herself. The Hungarian had been delayed, but everyone agreed he would nominate that crashing bore, his man Emil Horvath. And, of course, the British had Major Prescott-Menzies.

As an attendant moved around the table renewing drinks, the Intelligence chiefs worked out the details. Budget cuts precluded anything spectacular. The good old days of the Hindenburg explosion were gone forever. Someone suggested a minibus. The operatives to be eliminated would be sent on assignment to view the peak of that famous alp, the Grimselhorn. On the return trip, the minibus would fail to negotiate the steep, treacherous turn called the Jungfrau's Hairpin.

But as the others argued over how the costs should be divided, Count Crispi of CIAO—as the Italian Intelligence service is known—burst in emotionally. "Gentlemen," he insisted, "we owe these people a better death than this. Blunderers or not, they are our companions-at-arms. Take young Matteo, my representative on the bus. Certainly he's a lazy sports-mad lout. But I don't doubt he would cheerfully give his life for Italy provided he wasn't asked during the World Cup match."

Crispi looked around at them with warm brown eyes. "Gentlemen, these poor colleagues of ours have never known the joy of successfully completing a mission. Let us give them that pleasure." Crispi raised an elegant finger. "During the trip up the mountain the bus will pass through three tunnels in whose shadows we will arrange for switcheroos so simple that even this collection of dunderheads can carry them off." (In the dark argot of espionage à "switcheroo" meant the trading of information by the exchange of ostensibly innocent, everyday objects.)

"Now picture them on the way back down with their missions accomplished, my friends," said Crispi, his voice thickening with emotion. "There they are smiling to themselves, eyes glistening as

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they imagine a future filled with advancement and glory in the service. Those last moments before the bus plunges to the mountain valley below will be the best of their lives."

"Damn, let's do it," said the American, blinking and turning away to protect his tough-guy facade. The Russian blew his nose and nodded. All the others agreed.

Just as they finished working out the details, the ashen-faced Hungarian burst into the room to announce, "There's a dead man in the corridor."

The Intelligence chiefs rushed out to find the Portuguese security man who'd been guarding the door dead from a bullet in the chest. His trigger finger had been cut off and taken away. They knew what that meant.

"Damn Glinka to hell!" swore the Dane, referring to Albania's Marshal Glinka, the loose cannon of the Intelligence community. Glinka was the reason the Dane had volunteered Joseph Thorwald for the bus. A thoroughly vain but excellent operative, Thorwald had been captured by Glinka's people in a fake male-beauty-contest scheme. They had tampered with him subliminally and from that day forward Thorwald reacted to the phrase "Hello, Joe, what do you know?" by leaping up on the nearest chair and singing the Albanian national anthem, "Sheep of My Homeland." ("Sheep of my homeland, glorious sheep, I will be true to thee till death.") A man malicious children chased down the street just to hear him sing was no longer of any use to Denmark or to himself. Thorwald would drive the bus.

So one of Glinka's men had killed to eavesdrop on their meeting! The Intelligence chiefs rushed back inside. But the room was empty. An unlatched window behind the small service bar showed the way the intruder had fled. "The waiter," said the Russian.

"It was a waitress," insisted the American.

"The important thing," said the Englishman, "is what he or she overheard."

Everyone thought for a moment before the relieved laughter came. Thank heaven they'd only been going over the details for the dunderhead bus.

"Oh, by the by," said the Hungarian, "count my man Horvath out. He developed a ticklish throat at the symphony last night and mistook his cyanide capsule for a throat lozenge." The others shrugged. It happened all the time. But that left an empty seat on the bus.

Then sad-eyed Superintendent MacNaughton of the Royal Ca-

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nadian Mounted Police, who'd been sent out for cigarettes, came back into the room with his purchases. Everyone looked glum. They were embarrassed for MacNaughton. No RCMP superintendent would ever attend one of these meetings again. The Force was about to lose its Intelligence-gathering function due to a scandal involving illegal break-ins and violations of civil liberties back home.

Then it occurred to Crispi that as a parting gift the chiefs might let MacNaughton choose one of his people to take Horvath's place on the bus.

Crispi smiled and, because he thought Canadians liked to be addressed "I say, old man," he said, "I say, old man—"

Acting Sergeant Maynard Bullock of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police ran a knuckle through his moustache and stood in front of the hotel-room mirror. "Swiss cheese," he said and, smiling, he tugged at the ends of his clip-on bow tie. The knot clicked open. By godfrey, he'd always wanted to use one of these secret cameras. Told to take whatever he wanted on the assignment, Bullock had hurried to the equipment window in the headquarters basement and signed out a bow-tie camera. Old-fashioned? Maybe. But what about that Yank who was so loaded down with Fancy Dan electronic stuff and power packs that when he stepped into a puddle with a hole in his shoe he was fried to a crisp? They said he lit up like a Christmas tree hung with sputtering balls of blue fire. A bow-tie camera would never do that to you.

Time to go. Bullock had a bus to catch. He picked up the box of cigars from the bed and left the room just as the ancient elevator across the hall delivered a guest to the floor. "The lobby and don't spare the horses," said Bullock, for jocularity was part of his disguise. He had registered as Bob Jones, Hudson's Bay blanket salesman. But the grey-headed elevator operator who had laughed tolerantly at this exhortation the night before was grave this morning.

"A terrible occurrence, Mr. Jones," he said. "A guest has been found stabbed to death."

"Good godfrey!" exclaimed Bullock.

"A grisly business, sir," agreed the old man. "The killer made off with the victim's right index finger."

When Bullock swallowed with horror, his adam's apple triggered the bow-tie camera, which photographed the elevator operator. Blast! thought Bullock. When he got a chance he'd have to make an adjustment.

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Bullock crossed the cobbles to the snub-nosed bus at the far end of the town square. Even the murdered hotel guest couldn't dampen his pleasure at this assignment. Sometimes in recent years he feared his career had come to a dead end amid the flower beds of Ottawa's Parliament Hill. Oh, he knew he had a job most Mounties envied. On the cutting edge of the Force's public relations, so to speak. Still, he'd been proud when Superintendent MacNaughton himself had dropped by the flower bed with a twinkle in his eye to tell Bullock he had a trip to Switzerland in his future.

"That's the Force for you," Bullock remarked to good old Mavis, his wife. "You think the big guys don't even know you're alive. But they do."

Well, they could count on him to handle the assignment. In the third tunnel on the trip up the mountain someone would say "Sweets for the sweet" and offer Bullock a box of chocolates. Bullock would exchange it for his box of Cream of Niagara cigars, Canada's finest. And they weren't your puny little C of N Members of Parliament. These were stout Governor-generals, each in its own aluminum tube. The Force had done itself proud.

An oriental gentleman with an inscrutable air and a stuffed toy panda under his arm beat Bullock to the open door of the bus. As the Mountie paused on the top step several of the passengers rose slightly in their seats to greet him. A pretty woman with a marcelled head waved an old red Baedecker as if to catch his eye. A man with a bowler and a guard's moustache displayed a rolled-up plaid umbrella. A bald man with a monocle and a saber scar waggled his loden-green porkpie hat. A friendly crew. Bullock wagged his box of cigars. But no box of chocolates replied. Maybe his contact was in the little boy's room in the back. Bullock was happy to see the bus had that convenience.

Bullock took the aisle seat right behind the driver, since the final part of his mission required a word or two in that man's ear. His immediate neighbor wore a white stetson, tooled cowboy boots, a tan suit cut in the western style, and a silver long-horn-steer-head toggle on his string tie. He also carried a folded copy of *The Wall Street Journal* under his arm. "American, eh?" guessed Bullock, offering his hand. "Bob Jones here. Hudson's Bay blanket salesman."

"Billy Earl Mattoon," said the American. "Navaho blanket salesman. It's a small world."

They grinned at each other, matching tooth for tooth. Little did he know, thought Bullock.

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Another passenger arrived, a stocky, mannish-looking woman in a fedora and tweeds, wearing a large *Kiss me, I'm East German* button. She clicked her heels and made a small bow to the company. "Frau Koehler," she said and took a seat halfway down the aisle. She was followed by a priest with a silver-headed cane who did not introduce himself. After him came a fat, rumpled-looking man with a bright-red tie that he fingered coyly in the Oliver Hardy manner.

Then a grey-haired man with a schoolmaster's air came from the back of the bus carrying a three-pound red velveteen box of chocolates under his arm and sat down across the aisle. "A pleasure to meet you, Mr. Jones," he said when Bullock introduced himself. "Arthur Frobish. I'm into tyrolean cuckoo clocks." Bullock tried to attract the man's attention to the box of cigars by drumming his fingers on it. But Frobish showed no interest.

The driver arrived, a long-faced blue-chinned man with a snappish look, as though a wrong word might set him off. Laying a finger alongside the visor of his cap, he announced in several languages, "Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for taking Heidi Tours. Enjoy your trip." Then he revealed the butt of the automatic in his belt. "But mostly, please observe the *No Talking to the Driver* sign."

Strange people, the Swiss, thought Bullock as the bus moved out of town. But then he took a quick glance back over the passengers. The woman in the fancy hairdo was writing in a diary without any ink coming out of her pen. The oriental gentleman was sitting with his legs crossed, smoking a cigarette and using a hollow compartment in the heel of his shoe for an ashtray. And the olive-skinned young man beside Frobish had his shoe off and was staring into it with great interest while holding the tip of a shoelace up to his ear. Bullock shook his head in wonderment, setting the damn bow tie off again. Blast. Time to pop back into the gents and make an adjustment.

As the green pastures began their dramatic tilt upward, Bullock started down the aisle. But the man in the bowler hooked his elbow with the crook of his umbrella, demanding, "Aren't you Smithers, the Duke of Dundas's head gamekeeper? Surely you remember me, Major Prescott-Menzies? His Lordship and I go back a long way."

"It must've been two other guys," said Bullock, shaking himself loose. By godfrey, he was all for keeping the connections with the Old Country to counterbalance the American bear hug, but he wished the Brits would stop mistaking everybody for hired help.

Then Bullock noticed the high-cheekboned blonde in a low-cut

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satin dress and feather boa sitting beside the man with the porkpie hat. In her lap she held a small plaster bust of Napoleon. As Bullock passed, she licked her lips, looked up at him, and winked.

What a weird collection, thought Bullock as he shut the door to the small toilet and took off the bow tie. He gave it a critical shake. Click. It took his picture. He shook it again. Click. Click. Click. He pounded the tie against the sink until it stopped. Then he put it on again and went back outside.

The passengers from the lefthand seats were leaning over the seated passengers on the right to look out their windows as the bus came up on a shepherd and his flock. Bullock joined the passengers' hopeful smiles and encouraging waves. But the shepherd refused to yodel. Dejected, everyone returned to his seat.

"Sweets for the sweet," said Frobish. Bullock jumped. But the man wasn't talking to him. He was offering a chocolate to the woman with the marcelled hair.

"Thank you, Monsieur, but I diet," she said.

Repeating his phrase, Frobish passed the box beneath Bullock's nose and over to the American. "Candy's not my game, pard," smiled Mattoon, glancing at Bullock's cigars. "Now a good smoke, that's something again."

Bullock reached up and put the box of cigars on the overhead rack. Out of sight, out of mind. Then he watched enviously as Frobish's shoe-gazing neighbor selected a chocolate from the offered box. Bullock understood what Frobish was up to. By pulling the "Sweets for the sweet" bit on everyone, now nobody would think twice when switcheroo time rolled around. But, boy, those chocolates looked good. And he remembered an old game the Mounties used to play to get through the long northern winters. When they were cribbaged out, they'd open a five-pound box of chocolates and play Snowbound. First they'd "one-potato, two-potato" to decide who started. The winner would look over the chocolates and make his pick. A soft center meant he lost his turn. A hard center meant he kept on choosing. A big part of the game was taking your time eating each chocolate and smacking your lips as you mulled over your next choice. Constable Tubby Tomkins had been a master at that. Good old Tubby. How the sled dogs howled when he came out the door!

The bus turned a sharp corner on the mountain road and entered a tunnel. The darkness was total. Cursing, the driver brought the bus to a crawl and announced, "Folks, the tunnel lights don't seem to be working. And ditto for our headlights and overheads. Please

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bear with Heidi Tours in this matter. And thank you for continuing to observe the *No Talking to the Driver* sign."

Bullock heard much whispering and moving around behind him. Damned excitable tourists! Well, here was one man who was going to keep his head while those around him were losing theirs. Just then Mattoon pushed his way out into the aisle, planting his boot heel on Bullock's foot as he passed. Mounties don't cry out in pain. They're taught the trick of biting the insides of their cheeks and sucking in air. It took Bullock several minutes of biting, blinking, and hissing like steam heat to recover. Then he sensed someone standing in the aisle beside him.

"Excuse me, Mr. Jones," whispered Frobish, "but Mr. Mattoon had his eye on your cigars. I thought a little sentry duty would be in order."

A moment later, while the American was squeezing back to his seat, the bus emerged into the sunlight again. Bullock eyed Mattoon with a grumpy frown. He was wearing the *Kiss me, I'm East German* button. Bullock glanced back at Frau Koehler, who now carried *The Wall Street Journal* under her arm. And the oriental gentleman had the priest's cane, the priest the stuffed panda. What a crazy crew!

While Frobish started his selective working of the passengers with the chocolates again, Bullock enjoyed the view—the high rampart of the snow-capped Alps against a very blue sky. Then Major Prescott-Menzies cried out, "But they're both as dead as the Viscount Devontree's prize Houdans the stoat got to! 'Just ghastly, Muffy,' he said to me. 'They were all covered with blood!' "

The passengers stood, staring in horror where he pointed. The man in the porkpie hat and the woman with the bust of Napoleon sat leaning temple to temple, each stabbed in the heart. "The rotter's cut off their trigger fingers!" exclaimed the Englishman. "Wait till I tell the Archbishop. His Grace's views on mutilation are known far beyond Canterbury."

Suddenly the back of the bus became a pandemonium of tongues. The two men in the last row were dead, stabbed and trigger fingers amputated.

"Listen up, everybody!" shouted Mattoon. "Things will go smoother if we all speak English, okay?"

"I second the motion," said Prescott-Menzies.

Blast, thought Bullock, Americans always have to run the show. But what did a dumb cluck Navaho-blanket salesman know about police investigation?

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A swarthy, big-nosed man in an Arab headgear and a western business suit said, "Certainly the driver must be told to turn us back. The police—"

Everyone jumped when the bus driver fired his automatic over their heads. "Here at Heidi Tours we never turn back!" he shouted. "The next bozo who even thinks about not observing the *No Talking to the Driver* sign gets galloping lead poisoning! And don't look now," he added, "but you've got another stiff up here."

And so they had. The young man in the seat beside Frobish was dead and defingered like the others. Bullock shook his head. The poor kid must have been killed while Frobish was standing guard over the cigars. He picked up the dead man's empty shoe. Inside on the heel was a small television screen where Milan was playing Florence at soccer. What would they think of next?

But then Bullock got an idea how to step into the investigation without revealing who he was. "Folks," he announced, "we sure do have a killer in our midst. We need someone to take charge of the investigation. And, well, without beating around the bus, I'd like to volunteer. Oh, sure, some of you are going to ask 'What's a dumb-cluck Hudson's Bay blanket salesman know about police work?' And it's true I'm just an ordinary joe like the rest of you. I'm not a Mountie or anything fancy like that. But you know, we've got a saying we say in Canada," lied Bullock. "We say, 'Scratch a Canadian and you'll find a Mountie.'"

The woman with the marcelled hair asked, "You mean you can explain this terrible finger business."

"Yeah," demanded Mattoon, who resented Bullock's taking charge, "what about the fingers?"

Blast, thought Bullock. Stumped already.

But Frobish piped up, "May I shed some light here? Like most people who live over cuckoo-clock warehouses, I suffer from insomnia—which my doctor treats with a wonderful drug that gears the sleep mechanism to darkness. You simply turn in, turn off the light, and sleep soundly until the sun rises. Recently, while waiting in the doctor's outer office, I found among his magazines a copy of *Spying for Profit,* a publication catering to the espionage community. Idly thumbing through it, I found a column called Tidbits, a collection of gleanings and oddments. One of the items told how a Marshal Glinka, I think it was, of the Albanian Intelligence service, had started a ghoulish lottery where his operatives won prizes from goatskin luggage to ski vacations to the Slag Mountains by writing

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their names in indelible ink on the trigger fingers of enemy operatives. When verified by fingerprint records, these digits were deposited in a large drum. Periodically, Marshal Glinka plunged his arm into the tumbling mass in the rotating drum and the prizes were awarded."

"You're saying there's an Albanian spy in our midst who thinks we're all spies?" demanded the priest. "Where could he have gotten a ridiculous idea like that?"

Nervous laughter ran through the bus.

Bullock looked around suspiciously and met the nervous gaze of the man with the Oliver Hardy tie. The man had screwed the stem from his pipe and, holding the bowl downward in his fist like the butt of a pistol, he eyed the other passengers warily. At Bullock's stare, he jammed the truncated pipe into the inside pocket of his jacket. A muffled shot followed. With a look of self disgust, the man keeled forward.

Bullock became aware that the passengers were staring at him with wide-eyed horror. Then he turned and saw the next tunnel rushing down on them.

"Don't anybody panic!" he shouted excitedly as total darkness swallowed them again. "Everybody stay in your seats!"

But someone shouldered Bullock aside from the front while someone else collided with him from the rear, sending him sprawling in the aisle. When he tried to get up, a rush of knees pummeled him down again. Many feet walked over him. Once he thought he heard a muffled scream. And once he felt the ferrule of a cane or an umbrella in the small of his back.

Then the bus found daylight and the screams began. Four more passengers, including the woman with the marcelled hair, sat murdered and trigger-fingerless in their seats.

"So now what, Mr. Jones?" demanded Mattoon.

For the sake of neatness and to give himself time to come up with an answer to that question, Bullock ordered all the bodies carried to the back of the bus. That was when Prescott-Menzies and the man in the Arab headdress discovered someone had cut off the trigger finger of the pipe-gun victim. And as Bullock and the oriental gentleman added the woman with marcelled hair to the bodies in the rear, the Mountie noted her eyes were wide open in death while those of the others were closed. And her lipstick was smeared, perhaps by the murderer's hand. Was that the muffled scream he heard? And was that the clue he needed? Bullock corrugated his brow. But

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he spun around when Frau Koehler clicked her heels to accept a Frobish chocolate.

"To keep the spirits up," urged the Austrian.

"Sure, this is all depressing," admitted Bullock, "but remember, each time the murderer kills, he or she—" (Frau Koehler acknowledged his glance by clicking her heels and bowing) "—tightens the noose of guilt around his or her—" (a click and a bow) "—neck."

"Brilliant," said Frobish, bright-eyed with admiration. Even Mattoon seemed impressed.

Bullock smiled. "Okay. Now we'll sit down together up front. I've got a plan to frustrate the heck out of Mr. Albanian spy's deadly little game." On the way to the front Bullock mumbled, "Mr. Frobish, maybe let's hold off the switcheroo until after the last tunnel, okay?" Frobish understood.

When they were all in their places in the two rows behind the driver's seat, Bullock called for a show of cigarette lighters. Mattoon, Prescott-Menzies, and Frobish—who was already beaming at the ingenuity of Bullock's idea—produced theirs, snapping them on and off. Bullock pulled out the handful of kitchen matches all pipe smokers carry and gave two each to the priest, the man in the Arab headdress, the oriental gentleman, and Frau Koehler.

As the next tunnel rushed toward them, Bullock raised a match and lay his thumbnail against it. "On my signal," he ordered. In the next instant they plunged into darkness. "Now!" shouted Bullock. But all the lighters clicked without lighting and the head popped off Bullock's match. "Come on, you guys with matches!" he shouted, cracking a second match with his thumbnail. It flared in the darkness, blinding him for an instant so he never saw who blew it out. Then Mattoon broke for the aisle, treading on the same spot on the same foot. Bullock bit, sucked air, and blinked in pain. He heard a scuffle and a crash. A struggling Prescott-Menzies exclaimed, "I've got the rotter like a rat in a trap. Like the Prime Minister told me when he caught the butler watering the whiskey, 'Muffy, my lad, I just—' "

Here the bus broke out into daylight, revealing Mattoon outstretched in the aisle with the crook of the Englishman's umbrella hooked around his ankle. Frobish was on his feet, clutching the cigar box to his chest protectively. The priest, the man in the Arab headdress, the oriental gentleman, and Frau Koehler were dead, their

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matches lying on the floor in or near the small puddles of blood from their severed fingers.

Blast, thought Bullock.

He scratched his jaw and looked around. Mattoon's white stetson recalled the story of Yukon Eugene, the king of the Klondike dynamiters and claim jumpers. A braggart who swore he could drink longer, shoot straighter, and piss higher than any man north of the Sixtieth Parallel, Eugene's ace in the hole was an arsenal of stubby dynamite sticks held in loops like a cartridge belt sewn to the lining of his fur cap.

When he learned Constable Noble Trueblood was on his trail, Eugene started traveling in crowds and let out the word he figured on taking a lot of people with him when his number came up. Constable Trueblood bided his time. He was outside the Dawson City Glee Club that fateful night in 1949 when the Toronto Maple Leafs won the Stanley Cup. He heard the shouts around the radio. He saw the hats thrown up in the air. And of course Eugene's went higher than the rest. Trueblood's revolver spoke at the zenith. The explosion was high and harmless, though ears were still ringing all round when Trueblood led the blubbering braggart away.

"How about a little look-see inside your hat, Mr. Mattoon," said Bullock sternly.

"Navaho blanket salesmen don't take off their hats for anyone," said the American defiantly. "Everybody knows that."

"Yeah?" said Bullock.

"Yeah!"

They stood jaw to jaw and glared.

At last Mattoon said, "All right. Okay. But first Prescott-Menzies opens his umbrella."

"Sounds fair enough, Major," said Bullock, for the umbrella could easily hide a cache of fingers.

"Not indoors," insisted Prescott-Menzies.

Bullock understood. He'd been raised to believe that opening an umbrella indoors was an act of madness, like desecrating King Tut's tomb.

"But a bus doesn't qualify as indoors," he insisted.

"All right," conceded Prescott-Menzies. "If Frobish lets us check out his box of chocolates."

"Gladly," said Frobish. "If Mr. Jones will show us what's in his cigar box."

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Smiling triumphantly, Bullock opened the box and held up two handfuls of aluminum tubes. "Nothing here but cigars."

Frobish bowed politely. He took the lid off the chocolates and let Prescott-Menzies pull out the cardboard separations between the layers and stir around with his hand. Then Prescott-Menzies opened out his umbrella and spun it on his shoulder. Nothing. Then Mattoon handed over his hat. Nothing. Blast, thought Bullock. They were right back where they started.

He was distracted by Frobish shaking the candy box to level the contents to put the lid on. By godfrey, those chocolates smelled good. Maybe Prescott-Menzies thought so, too.

"When I was with the Lancers in India, we used to play a game we called Monsoon during the rainy season," he said, and went on to describe Snowbound to a tee. "Anyone care to play? I was rather good. Though not so good as Jumbo, now Sir Jumbo Thwaites."

"Anything to take our minds off the carnage," said Frobish. "You go first and show us how."

"Count me in," said Bullock eagerly.

"No candy for me," said Mattoon, lighting up a cigar.

The Major rubbed his hands together, stared down at the chocolates, and made his first choice. He came up hard-centered. Chewing triumphantly, the Englishman chose correctly again. And again. He was on a roll. He picked seven hard centers in a row until, with cheeks bulging, he came a cropper with a chocolate-covered cherry.

Bullock was up now. But before he could make his pick, the bus came to a stop.

"Everybody out!" ordered the driver. "You've got five minutes to admire the Grimselhorn."

Frobish put the lid on the chocolates and, motioning Bullock to bring the cigars, he led the way out the door. The bus was parked beside a small beige sedan in an observation area rimmed with a low stone wall.

High above them towered the peak of the mighty Grimselhorn, magnificent against a blue sky now afloat with clouds of battleship size and color.

"Funny how a man always feels small looking at a mountain," observed Bullock, who thought himself no slouch when it came to philosophy.

"Well put, Mr. Jones," said Frobish. With a nod at the other two standing a few feet away in aweful contemplation of the alp, he asked, "Which do you think's the Albanian?"

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Bullock scratched his head. It was six of one and half a dozen of the other. Then he frowned and called over, "Hey, Mattoon, where'd you get that cigar?"

"All the dead men were sporting a cigar in their breast pockets," said Mattoon. "Some had two."

As a dark cloud slid across the sun, Bullock turned back to Frobish with a grim look. "I'll go for the Yank. That's Commie stuff, taking a cigar from a corpse. Next he'll be stealing the pennies from their eyes."

As Bullock spoke, Mattoon's upturned face filled with fear and he sprinted for the bus. He hadn't gone three strides when a sudden sun shower came pouring down, sending the others dashing after him. But just as Mattoon reached the door, he started to twitch violently while sparks and small sputtering balls of blue fire broke out up and down his body. He cried out through clenched teeth and fell to the ground. Then the sudden shower stopped and so did the twitching and sputtering. Mattoon was dead.

When they opened his shirt, they saw the blackened power pack and the electronic gear.

"Case closed," said Prescott-Menzies. "Here's our Albanian. He killed the real Mattoon back at the hotel and took his place, electronic rig and all."

"The Major's right, you know," said Frobish. Sensing Bullock's disappointment he added gently, "Stay here and enjoy the view. Let us load him on board. Then you and I'll make our little exchange."

Blast, thought Bullock, turning back to contemplate the Grimselhorn. A good case should close with some brilliant deductive stroke, not an act of God. In fact, when he came right down to it he didn't know whether to laugh or cry. He'd sure let a lot of carnage take place right under his nose.

Frobish returned with a sad smile for a sad job completed. "Sweets for the sweet," he said, handing over the box of chocolates. When Bullock handed him the box of cigars Frobish said, "Nice working with you, Mr. Jones," Then he pulled out a set of car keys and added, "I won't be going back with you and the Major. Got some side trips to make."

"You do good work, too," called Bullock as Frobish walked to the sedan. "Maybe our paths will cross again."

As the sedan pulled away, the bus driver honked the horn. Time to finish that game of Snowbound with Prescott-Menzies. But when

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Bullock got back inside, he found the Englishman dozing with his bowler tilted over his eyes. Blast, thought Bullock. He was seven chocolates down and wanted a chance to get even. As the bus started down the mountain, he reached over and shook the Major's arm. That was when he saw the stab mark and the missing finger.

Bullock leaped up like a shot. So the Albanian had only pretended to be electrocuted! But when he looked down at the body in the stetson it was grey and cold. And the trigger finger had been cut off. Bullock turned to stare at the driver's back suspiciously. But how could a man leave the wheel of a moving bus to kill?

So who could it be? Bullock's eyes narrowed. Frobish! Frobish was the Albanian agent! In a sudden rush it was all clear. He imagined himself confronting the man. He saw himself pacing up and down the aisle, puffing away on his pipe while the Albanian cowered in his seat. "Oh, it was a clever plan, my Communist friend." Puff-puff. Puff-puff. "When you'd killed the real Frobish back at the hotel, you injected his chocolates with that drug you spoke of that works with darkness to bring on sleep. Then you and a confederate drove up to the Grimselhorn view in separate cars. You left one there. On the way back, the two of you shot out the tunnel lights, arriving back in town in time to tamper with the bus lights, too." Puff-puff. Puff-puff.

"And here's how you worked the killing. When a tunnel was coming up, you offered your victims a piece of chocolate. They passed out in the darkness, allowing you to stalk about like a beast, killing and mutilating. Then under the pretext of guarding my cigars, you slipped the severed fingers into the aluminum tubes, disposing of the smokes in the pockets of the male victims. Why was the woman with the marcelled hair killed differently?" Puff-puff. Puff-puff. "Because she refused your offer of candy. Prescott-Menzies, on the other hand, ate so many you probably only had to tilt his bowler over his eyes to put him out like a light."

Puff-puff. Puff-puff. "Yes, it was all very clever. You only made one mistake, my Albanian friend." Here Bullock would spin around and jab his pipe at the murderer. But his dark chuckle of triumph trailed off into an exasperated sigh. For of course the man had made no mistake. He had killed many times over and escaped with his loot of fingers. Blast!

But on the brighter side, Bullock had pulled off the switcheroo. And there was the road sign. The Jungfrau's Hairpin was dead ahead. Time to give the driver the coded signal that the mission had

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been accomplished. Bullock stood up and cleared his throat in a friendly way. To his surprise the driver turned around and jammed his automatic between Bullock's eyes. "Don't talk to the driver," he snarled.

Bullock stared down the barrel of the automatic and pondered his next move. The warning in the man's words was as chillingly real as the steel between his eyes. On the other hand, Bullock's orders were explicit. And he had been trained to do or die. He swallowed so hard the blasted bow tie started up again.

Click. Click. Click. Vain Joseph Thorwald knew a bow-tie camera when he saw one. He turned his head to show his left profile, which much time before the mirror had convinced him was his best side. When he did, he broke eye contact. Bullock dropped to the floor, shouting, "Hello, Joe, what do you know?" as per instructions. To his horror, the driver took his hands off the wheel, leaped up onto his seat, and began singing a song about sheep of his homeland, glorious sheep.

Jumping to his feet, Bullock tried to reach the wheel with one hand while grappling for the automatic with the other. But the singer buried his free hand in Bullock's hair to steady himself and the sway of the bus dragged the Mountie away from the controls. Death was rushing up on them. Suddenly, the bus swayed the other way and the tottering singer dragged Bullock by his hair close enough to get a hand on the wheel and turn the bus from the looming guardrail.

But Bullock oversteered, sending the bus bearing down on a small beige sedan parked pointed the wrong way on the berm against the mountainside. The man he knew as Frobish stood by the front fender with the cigar box tucked under his arm. The look of pleasant expectation on his face changed to fear as the bus swerved toward him. Alertly, he bolted across the road to safety. But to avoid the sedan, Bullock swung the wheel the other way. The Albanian saw the bus veer toward him. Before it could run him down he placed a hand on the guardrail and vaulted over into space. Perhaps it seemed a good idea at the time.

Seconds later, his song ended, Thorwald collapsed into a passenger seat, sobbing like a humiliated child. When Bullock had the careening bus under control, he offered the man a chocolate just to shut him up. The driver was dead to the world after they hit the first tunnel. Bullock leaned back and tilted the man's cap down over his eyes . . .

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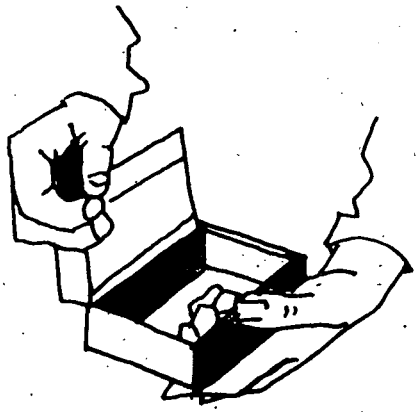
When the bus arrived back in the square, Bullock slid from behind the wheel and surveyed the carnage once more.

No, by godfrey, he didn't think he'd ever tell good old Mavis the final death count on this one. And he'd let the Swiss police sort things out for themselves.

With a sad shake of his head, he left the bus and the sleeping driver and crossed to the hotel. The long day wasn't over yet. In an hour he'd be in Zurich, by tomorrow morning back in Ottawa. What really kept him going was the look on Superintendent MacNaughton's face when he marched into his office with the box of chocolates under his arm, came to attention, and gave one of his snappiest salutes ever.



DETECTIVERSE

ROYAL CANADIAN

by ELEANOR SULLIVAN

He's eternally testing his measure,
Always putting his job before pleasure.
Deny as they like
The poor little tyke—
Sergeant Bullock's a national treasure!

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a *NEW* short story by

WILLIAM BANKIER

Farris approached the saxophone player with his hand extended. "I listened out in the lobby." He grinned as he shook hands. "I hope you don't mind."

"The woodwork is full of little things listening," Blake said. Usually he tolerated strangers until they crossed him, but Ralph Farris was something different. Instinctively, Blake was repelled by this man . . .

ZUT, ALORS, JOSIE

by WILLIAM BANKIER

Blake was drinking beer in a Montreal tavern, sitting alone, his mind running on. Suddenly he saw himself in a castle kitchen where a woman was carrying plates from stove to table. She was taffy-haired and square-jawed, with clear green eyes. She was serving a second man when Blake, their guest, burst into song. He sang a facetious rendition of "I Love Life" to their amusement and approval. At the end, the woman cried, "Bravo!" and Blake excused his behavior by explaining, "These stone walls are great for acoustics."

This imaginary encounter happened when Blake was twenty-six and living by himself in a room in the Old Town. Now he was thirty-nine, a professional musician booked into a jazz club in London's Soho. And he was still infatuated with the taffy-haired girl, calling her to mind frequently.

"Do you want to practice or what?" Coldstream said. It was Rudi Coldstream's club, this musty room with its long-standing liquor license and the engaging name, Beer. Rudi took the business risks and paid the performers.

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"Sorry," Blake said, beginning to unpack his tenor saxophone. "Let's go through 'I Remember You.' I have an idea for a unison riff before the last chorus."

When they finished playing, the club owner said, "It's okay if you don't mind stealing from the Benny Goodman sextet." He looked like anything but the competent jazz pianist that he was. Tall, thin, prematurely bald, he was dressed in a dark suit, striped shirt, and bowtie, his long face a mask of worry. Owners of small, failing insurance firms look like Rudi Coldstream.

Blake said, "I only steal from the best." He capped his instrument and began to take it apart.

"Is that the end of practice?"

"I want to get out of here."

"We can pause for a beer."

"I mean out of London. I feel like going back to Montreal."

Coldstream closed the lid over the piano keyboard, stepped down from the low stage, and wandered among the closely placed tables and chairs. When Beer was full to capacity, playing here was like blowing jazz into a hot wall of humanity. "You've got nothing left in Canada. Stick around."

"What for? All I do is go into studios and play backing tracks for singers I wouldn't listen to if they gave me their records. Or I go and do that gig in Covent Garden on a Saturday afternoon."

"You told me you enjoyed Covent Garden." Rudi had set it up for his friend. Taking a stereo playback machine with them, they had organized themselves in a patio between the shops where the old market used to be. Rudi pressed a button and out came the sound of the band from Blake's one and only LP, minus the solo track. The saxophonist took his place in front of the stereo and began to play, filling in the tenor parts. A crowd gathered, loved it, gave great applause. Rudi went about with a velvet collection bag and took lots of money—even sold a few albums.

"I enjoyed it at the time," Blake said. "Now it embarrasses me when I think of it."

"You should quit thinking. You embarrass too easily."

That was part of Blake's trouble, his tendency to think. Lately he had begun remembering Josie Lachance. Josie with her heavy, dark eyebrows and that massive braid of hair thrown across one shoulder like a ship's line anchoring her to life. But the line had snapped in California and she had gone down off the stern of that bastard's

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yacht—whatever his name was. It had been a nine-day wonder in the newspapers—some suspicion about the affair, but no proof.

What Blake remembered was Josie alive in Montreal, doing her number at The Big Bang, with Tancred accompanying her on his cartoon piano and the Old Town crowd feasting on the music. If Blake was going to keep her, then was the time. But he had contented himself with a kiss as they danced in her apartment in the small hours to faint sounds from an all-night radio station. Those smiling eyes looked at him, through him, sensing that he would never commit himself to the important move. So off she went to the U.S. and A., accepting the offer based on her eccentric French-Canadian single, "Zut, Alors," that had made it big in the American market.

Now, for some reason he couldn't explain, Blake felt ready to go home. Perhaps it was the fact that he was no longer *afraid* to go home. "My roots are back there, Rudi," he said. "There's nothing to keep me here."

"What about the video deal? I wish you'd consider that more seriously."

"Pie in the sky."

"If it goes, you wouldn't just be an anonymous sound any more. You'd be up front on a million home screens this time next year."

"Never happen."

"Wait. I mean it, stick around. This afternoon." Coldstream went to the bar, took up a telephone, and dialed. "The guy with the money is supposed to come in and listen to you. I didn't say anything because I know how shirty you can get when I go over your head." Into the telephone, he said, "Mr. Farris, please. Did he say he was coming to see Rudi Coldstream? That's lovely, thank you very much." He put down the telephone.

"You are organizing my life, Coldstream." Blake did not sound very unhappy. "It's a good thing you own a regiment of guards."

"This bloke Farris is an American. He represents people who are ready to put a ton of money into video production. I've half sold him already. All he wants is to hear you play."

There was movement in the shadows at the entrance to the club where photographs of famous performers crowded the walls. A man walked into the light, briefcase in one hand, long cigarette in the other, swaggering. He slung the case onto a table, placed the cigarette between his teeth, took one set of fingers in the other, and began cracking each knuckle like a priest doing his rosary. There

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were waves of silver hair over a tanned face half concealed behind dark glasses.

"Mr. Farris—glad you could make it!" Coldstream said. "You're just in time to hear Blake play."

"Call me Ralph." The accent was middle American. Farris approached the saxophone player with his hand extended. "I just heard him. I listened out in the lobby." He grinned as he shook hands. "I hope you don't mind."

"The woodwork is full of little things listening," Blake said. Usually he tolerated strangers until they crossed him, but Ralph Farris was something different. Instinctively, Blake was repelled by this man.

Coldstream jumped in with a brisk laugh. "Would you like him to do more?"

"I've heard enough," the American said.

"And?"

"The guy gets around the instrument. It was a little hard in places. We're not interested in somebody who plays like Coltrane."

"So what are you saying?" Blake asked.

"That you could be our man. You look right for the video audience we have in mind." Farris glanced at the musician's outfit—the short trousers held up by thick braces, the T-shirt with hacked-off sleeves, the white rolled sox above high-laced basketball boots. With his Marines haircut and his muscular arms, Milton Blake looked a tough character. When he came on stage the drinkers fell silent, even those who hadn't come to hear him play. "All we need," Farris concluded, "is for you to tailor your performance."

"I play the way I play."

"Let's have a drink," Coldstream said. "We're talking about years of video distribution worldwide, with everybody getting rich. Let's not decide it off the top of the head."

Farris laughed. "It's up to you guys. I have three more people to listen to before I make a decision."

"Will you have that drink?"

"Why not? I have to wait for my sister anyway. She's picking me up here."

As he got out a bottle, glasses, and ice, Coldstream drew Blake aside. "Will you behave? Give this deal a chance!"

"I hate the little creep."

"That's irrational. You've known him less than five minutes."

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"Are you going to try and persuade me life is rational?"

They sat at a couple of tables, Blake alone at one, and drank and talked. Farris explained he was based in New York now after years in the music business on the West Coast. He had shifted to video when he saw it would be the gold mine of the future. "So I decided to get my share."

"And don't anybody mess with Fred C. Dobbs," Blake mumbled.

"What?"

Coldstream exercised his laugh again. "A reference to Treasure of the Sierra Madre. Blake loves old movies."

They heard the front door open and close, then a woman's voice called, "Anybody home?"

"In here, Tina!" Farris responded. As she came into the room, he said, "My sister, Tina Germaine. She married this poor sap, and when they split she thought Germaine sounded classier than Farris so she kept it."

"Listen to the man," the newcomer said. "My brother is obviously not taking his medication." She drew a wide, knee-length corduroy skirt about her as she sat down. "You must be Coldstream," she smiled at the club owner, "and you with the saxophone case, you have to be Milton Blake—the reason why we're all here."

Blake was struck dumb. He was looking at the girl from his tavern fantasy in Montreal thirteen years ago. The clear green eyes smiling at him as if she shared his knowledge, the taffy hair, the squarish, masculine jaw above the contradictory lacy ruffle of her crimson blouse.

Coldstream sounded confident for the first time since the Yank impressario invaded his club. He had not missed his friend's reaction to the charismatic girl. "That is Milt Blake, all right," he said, "and I think we're all going to have a profitable relationship."

Tina accepted a drink and joined in a half hour of unclassifiable chatter. Then she startled the two young musicians by saying, "Everybody come back to the castle and I'll make us something to eat."

"You heard right," Farris said. "We live in what used to be a castle near a village in Kent. Parts of it are haunted."

"It would be if you live there," Blake said. His relationship with the video man had become based on insult.

"I don't know what's got into my friend," Coldstream said.

"Don't apologize." Farris was lighting a fresh cigarette that looked as long as a bandleader's baton. "I like a salty guy. You have a

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pretty good idea where you're at with somebody as obnoxious as Blake."

"I think Blake is a pussycat," Tina said, taking hold of one of his heavily muscled arms and escorting him from the club as if he were her childhood sweetheart.

She got behind the wheel of a grey Daimler and drove the party out of London via Vauxhall Bridge and down into the county of Kent, avoiding the motorway, wheeling majestically along secondary roads, occasionally through a tunnel of emerald-green light where the sunken road became a lane under a latticework of trees. Villages came and went, displaying tudor facades, eccentric squares, and many old people frozen in place as the limousine rolled past. Blake kept waiting to see a dipping head with a fist knuckling a forelock.

"The peasants seem respectful," he said.

"You should see them around the castle," Farris said. "The place was deserted for years before I began renting it. What I spend on booze alone has doubled the local economy."

It was more a folly than a true castle. Some Victorian industrialist had seized upon ruins from an earlier age and had paid architects and builders to bring it to life. The result was a rambling, many-roofed edifice with one flinted tower, most of it hidden behind a jungle of giant rhododendron.

"What, no moat?" Coldstream asked.

Tina swung the car around a curve of gravel and stopped in front of an aperture hewn in the shrubbery, beyond which could be seen a brass lion's head gleaming on a dark oak door. Farris led the way through into an atmosphere so freighted with musty chill after the warmth of the summer evening that Blake held his breath as long as he was able and then breathed only in shallow gulps. He was convinced there was something terrible in the air, plague germs from the Middle Ages, flecks of lint from ancient shrouds.

"Come on through to the kitchen," Tina said. "It's the only room really worth using."

She came to him where he was sitting at a table under arching beams thrusting out of slab stone walls. The kitchen was part castle, part *House Beautiful*. Installed on the flagstone floor were modern appliances—a microwave oven, a bank of stereo equipment. She put a beaker of wine into his hand. "Poor man, you look as if you're thinking the most awful thoughts."

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"You wouldn't believe what I'm thinking," Blake said. His mind was back in the Montreal tavern, comparing his long-range premonition with this reality.

She gave up on the cryptic musician for the moment, although she had decided he was the man for her plan the moment she laid eyes on him a couple of hours ago. Turning to the club owner, she said, "Where did you come up with a name like Coldstream? I saw the Coldstream Guards outside Buckingham Palace the other day."

"Coldstream is a place up near the Scottish border. My ancestors came from around there. I've never traced the line, but that must be the explanation."

"Unless your grandfather was a plumber," Farris said. He was refilling his glass from a bottle of white wine the size of the carboys in which acid is shipped.

Coldstream chuckled dutifully. "Are you based here in London, Tina," he asked, "or back in the States?"

She was sliding a casserole into the microwave, the jaw set, one wisp of hair clinging to her cheek, determination in the pale-green eyes. She cooked the way she drove a car—fast, but no mistakes.

"For years I've been following Ralph," she said, drying her hands carefully on a towel. The way she worked over each finger was a copy of her brother doing the cracking job on his knuckles. "The West Coast, then back to New York City."

"She goes where the money is," Farris jeered. He patted the front of his jacket where his wallet was probably concealed.

"But I want to go home," she said. "There's a town in Connecticut with a big frame house and acres of tall grass behind it. Cats in the grass. Not a long walk to the library. Mother sent me there to change her books." The green eyes were a thousand miles away.

In an impatient voice, Ralph Farris said, "The old house was sold years ago. Will you forget about the old house and concentrate on today?"

"What was sold can be bought again," Tina murmured.

Blake lifted his face from his glass. "I want to go home, too," he said, giving Tina a wistful smile.

When they were seated around the table and Tina was serving plates of food, the sense of déjà vu became so intense that Blake, almost drunk, put his head back and began to sing as he had done when he fantasized the scene thirteen years ago.

"I love life and I want to live,
"To drink of life's fullness, take all it can give . . ."

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He roared through the old standard in a healthy baritone, the others looking from his face to each other's as he persisted to the end of the chorus.

"Bravo!" Tina cried when he finished.

"These stone walls are great for acoustics," he said by way of apology.

"Calls for more wine," Tina said, lugging the bottle to Blake's glass, cradling it in her arms like a bloated baby.

"Or the drying-out process, as the case may be," Coldstream said. But he was relieved that his silent friend seemed to be loosening up.

"It's eerie," Blake said. "This whole scene is totally familiar to me. The castle kitchen—you in particular, Tina. Me singing that song . . ."

"An interesting phenomenon," Farris said. "I've been told that what happens is a temporary short-circuit in the brain. What is occurring now passes through a connection that usually handles recollection. So you experience the moment as if it were a memory."

"I've had those," Blake said. "But this is different. I first experienced it years ago in Montreal. I've been thinking of it off and on ever since. It's no trick of the mind."

Tina brought her plate and sat beside him. "Fascinating," she said, looking at his eyes, his cheek, his chin, the neckline of his shirt. "You must tell me more."

Blake turned to his food and began forking it in without tasting it. He glanced at his watch. A lot of time had slipped past—it was nearly nine o'clock. "Looks like eat and run," he said.

"Not possible," Tina replied. "I've had far too much to drink and Ralph doesn't drive." She widened her eyes and adopted a Boris Karloff lisp. "The bridge is out—you will have to spend the night."

"My driving days ended shortly after I got my license in California," Farris said earnestly. "Every time a concrete overpass appeared, I felt myself aiming at it. A couple of near misses scared hell out of me."

"Such a healthy urge to suicide," his sister said. "But he won't give in to it. Too mean to do the world a favor."

Farris seemed to be embarrassed. "They'll think you mean it, Tina."

The sleeping quarters were in a more modern part of the building. Weaving from the wine, Blake seemed to be roaming here and there

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over carpeted floors, being shown the bathroom, using it, watching Tina turn down his bed. Then he was between chilly sheets, warming quickly, drifting. He would do the videos, take the money, and run to Montreal. It would mean fitting himself back into the Old Town without Josie Lachance. Josie had been such a figure in his life. She was like a rowdy boy, holding her guitar high to pluck the chords that accompanied the country song she was singing. Once, putting the instrument aside, she took jovial offense at something Blake had said, got a headlock on him, and threw him to the grass under the tree where they had spread their picnic. But just when she was punishing him in the fight, she became soft, feminine, yielding. Next came passion, ending in urgent stalemate. Josie, Josie—*zut, alors!*

The covers were drawn back and he embraced her as she slipped in beside him. Skin to scorch him, hands clasping his head, lips covering his face with whispering kisses. It was quick and powerful, and when it was ended she said, "By the way, my name's not Josie."

"Tina?"

"We're all the same with the lights out. I guess it's true what they say."

"No, I was dreaming. You woke me up."

"That's for sure."

She plumped pillows and raised herself against the headboard. She folded her arms—Blake could see her faintly in the pale wash of moonlight through the window. "Strange about that story you told at dinner. Remembering me and the kitchen."

"All true."

"How do you explain it?"

"Can't."

"I think we were meant to meet. Our lives join here like tributaries of a river and we flow on together."

Now that he was awake, passion spent, Blake was more interested in getting back to Montreal than in flowing anywhere with Tina Germaine. "Interesting idea." He tried steady breathing to suggest returning sleep.

"I was wondering what to do about Ralph," she said. "Now I know."

"Ralph?"

"All the family money went to him. Never mind I'm two years older—he's the boy. Typical. Oh, he takes care of my basic needs, but it isn't what I want. I want the house in Connecticut."

"Sounds a lovely place."

"And not far from Montreal. We could see a lot of each other." She

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was silent for a while. If anything happens to Ralphie, the money comes to me. So something must happen to Ralphie."

Blake decided to speak. "You're talking about killing your brother."

"Not me. I'd be the first one the police would investigate since the inheritance gives me motive. But they'd have no reason to come after you."

"Forget it."

"Why should I? He's been teasing me and putting me down for years."

"Forget about involving me."

"It's fate, lover. Why do you think you had your premonition? We've come together for a reason. Don't fight it."

Josie Lachance used to pronounce a soothing phrase when circumstances worked out in a fortunate way. *"C'est voulu."* It is meant to be. "Count me out," Blake said.

"But it's perfect. No motive—nothing to connect you with the event. If anything, it's the other way since Ralph will just have hired you to record a series of videos. We'll think of a simple way to do it. Then when things are quiet again, you'll be in Montreal and I'll be in Connecticut. And we'll both be rich."

"It seems perfect, as you say. But there's one problem." Blake turned heavily onto his side, giving her his back. "I don't kill people."

A confirming letter arrived at Blake's apartment five days later. He read it twice sitting by his window with his morning coffee, then dropped it on the carpet and peered down onto Cambridge Circus. Shaftesbury Avenue, Charing Cross Road—the interesting streets fed traffic in and out. Swarms of tourists from Europe and America did the zombie-walk from one theater marquee to another, then wandered off into Soho or down to Leicester Square, bemused as Blake still was after all these years by the fascination of London.

In his letter, Ralph Farris laid out the conditions of the video deal. It was all very businesslike and certainly generous. Blake would be quids in pocket when he flew back to Montreal. He thought of Tina, guilt that had been bothering him since the night at the castle coming back stronger than before. He had done nothing, himself. But if Tina went ahead and topped her brother, then Blake would be morally if not legally involved. She had told him her intention and he knew she was capable of following through. Should he not tell the police?

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But if he did, there would be skepticism. She would deny having said anything—his word against hers. And would Ralph be grateful? Probably not. From her inside position, Tina would poison her brother's mind and the video deal might fall through.

Blake got dressed, went downstairs, and wandered over to Coldstream's place. The grey Daimler was parked outside. He went into the coffee bar across the street and used the telephone. When Rudi answered, Blake said, "Just got a letter from Farris. About the video. Can I come over and discuss arrangements?"

"Hell, yes. Give me ten minutes to put on my makeup."

Blake ordered a coffee and waited. A few minutes later, Tina hurried from the club doorway, hefting her shoulderbag, harrowing her hair with the fingers of one hand. She slid into the car and drove away. Blake gave it five minutes more, then crossed the street again, and confronted Coldstream in his kitchen upstairs. He handed over the letter.

"This is great," Rudi said after reading it. "How do you see the presentation?"

"Something heavy," Blake improvised. "Smoke and shadows and glowing red light, me playing a blues, and as the vapor clears we see this girl strapped into the electric chair. Tina Germaine."

Coldstream's face fell apart. "What the hell is that?"

"Has she enlisted you instead of me?"

"I don't follow."

"I see she has. Don't be crazy, old friend. She's crazy, but don't you join her."

"Are you talking about Tina?"

Blake gave Rudi's shoulder just enough push to bring his face around. "I was outside. I saw the car, then I saw her come out and drive away. She spent the night, okay?"

"I do believe you're jealous." The campy voice did not work, nor did the self-deprecating laugh.

"Lay the lady if you like. I did. But don't go along with her plan."

"She's right to want him dead, Milt. Did she tell you the way he treats her?"

"Then let her do what she has to do."

"The money." Coldstream made a fist. "Can you imagine what I can do with that money? You know how the club has me living from hand to mouth. I could pay off every one of the sharks I owe. I could be independent. Her place in Connecticut—she showed me photographs of the house and the estate. It's ideal for a summer jazz

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festival. We could surpass Newport. You'd play there, I'd run it, your old gang from Montreal will come down—"

"No, no, no," Blake said quietly but emphatically. "You'd be two in a tiny cell in Wandsworth or Dartmoor. I'd come and visit you whenever I could."

"Never. It can be done without detection. You think all killers are caught? Tina would get caught if *she* tried—she has motive. But not me. There's nothing to connect me."

"That's the argument I was given. You seem to have bought it."

Coldstream's kettle began to whistle. He went to switch it off. "I was right a minute ago. You're jealous because Tina has turned to me. You don't want her barging into this long-standing relationship of ours. But I think it makes all kinds of sense." Crockery mugs fell over as he thrust a hand among them. "You want coffee?"

Two nights later, Milton Blake opened at Rudi Coldstream's Soho jazz mecca, Beer. Everything was right, including the slightly amateurish posters outside in rough black letters on yellow paper. They seemed to say, We don't waste money on slick promotion, the music sells itself.

Even the weather cooperated. A series of high-pressure days had totaled up into an evening submerged in humid air that could have rolled in out of a Louisiana bayou. Every door and window was open, letting the club atmosphere spill out. Cars crawled. Cops switched off their handsets, doffed helmets, and became sunburned young men with damp hair. Tourists sat in doorways. All sharing a common appreciation for the bouncing, driving music of Milt Blake.

Inside, Blake was a couple of steps above his audience, literally and figuratively. Standing on the low stage fronting piano, bass, and drums, he was three quarters of an hour into the set and the dark mass of people had become a solid field of response over which he floated, sustained by energy from the golden horn. He was finishing with "I Cover the Waterfront," playing the old ballad in a slow, gutsy style so penetrating it had even killed conversation in the club washrooms. It hadn't been his intention to play this song tonight, he hadn't thought of it in years, but suddenly the tune was in his mind and Blake had learned to heed such messages.

The performance did nothing for those people queued outside and waiting to get in. Overwhelming applause was followed by a general raising of hands as customers signaled waiters—everybody was staying for another set. Coldstream left the piano and followed his soloist

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off the stage. "Incredible," he said, his face lowered close to Blake's ear. "Where the hell did that come from?"

They ran the genial gauntlet and made it back to the owner's table on a dais with a railing around it. Tina Germaine cleared a seat for Rudi, who slipped in beside her. Farris looked at Blake with new eyes. "Now," he said, "for the first time, I see what your friend has been talking about. Can you do that on our video?"

"I never know what I can do."

"He can do it," Coldstream said.

Drinks arrived. Conversation of a general business nature began to cross the table. Farris knew a good designer he would import from New York. Rudi believed the videos should contain a story. The writers who worked for the leading pop group were available. Blake listened mostly, and watched Rudi and Tina. She was not too obvious with her brother present, but he could see them connecting in subtle ways.

Farris turned sideways and drew Blake with him, putting a little space between them and the others, suggesting a sort of intimacy. " 'I cover the waterfront,' " he quoted the song, " 'I'm watching the sea . . .' You took me back, my friend. For a few minutes, I was in California."

"You worked there, didn't you?"

"And lived there. It was the place. But when the thing happened, I had to go. Sold my boat and took a job back East."

Blake had only to nod—Farris's reminiscence was in the machine and playing.

"We used to spend all the time we weren't working down on the boat. Either in the harbor or cruising. Sometimes we'd do a little fishing, or we'd drink and get high and live off that ocean air. But my big mistake was getting involved with this girl." His eyes were melancholy. "Never let them get a hold on you."

"They're supposed to."

"She was a good singer but not great. She had that one hit record in Canada, but it only made it in the States because of the French. It was a novelty."

Blake raised his head slowly. His eyes seemed to emerge from a long sleep.

"We tried to get something else going for her. I was artists and repertoire then for Stipend Records. It wasn't coming easy. But meanwhile, she had moved in with me on the strength of a couple of dates. Hell, I should have kissed her off before it happened."

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"What happened?" Blake asked quietly.

"Just the two of us, we were alone on the boat in the harbor. Maybe I arranged it that way, I can't tell now. We drank a lot and we had one of our arguments. You've never heard sharp tongue till you've been told off by a French-Canadian woman. So I invited her to take a hike and she did. And that was when it happened."

"What?"

"You never heard? It was in the papers for weeks. She was leaving by the stern when she missed the step and fell into ten feet of water. She was on the surface for half a minute and the funny thing was she never yelled. Just struggled, looking up at me. I could have jumped in—I could have reached her with a pole. But I did nothing, we just looked at each other until she went down." Farris stared into the depths of his glass. "The cops were suspicious, but they couldn't prove anything."

"I heard about it," Blake said.

"The bottom line is I wanted her dead because that would tidy up my life. Can you understand a thing like that?"

Blake's throat was so dry he had to clear it more than once. "Wanting somebody dead so much you'd let it happen?" he said. "Yeah, I can understand that."

The club closed. Waiters collected glasses, put them through the machine, emptied the ashtrays. Somebody hoovered the carpet. But they could not obliterate the invisible evidence in the air of the volcano that had erupted in the room. Blake took Tina aside. "Come for a chat," he said.

He led her through the kitchen and out the back door. Cars raced by on Shaftesbury Avenue a block away, but the laneway was quiet. "What's on your mind?" she asked.

He told her what he had learned from Farris about the girl who fell off his yacht and drowned. "That was Josie Lachance from Montreal," he concluded. "Remember the way I called you Josie in my sleep?"

"You knew her?"

"Better than that." He looked her in the eye. "I'm ready now to do what you said. If you've been lining up Rudi to take over, forget him. I have to do it."

"I always wanted you rather than him. He was my second choice."

"You've got me."

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"You're like me—you want him dead because you hate him. Rudi was going to do it for the money."

Blake often felt drained after a performance, but tonight he was in pieces. His mind was outside his body—he couldn't quite feel his limbs. "When and where?"

"Okay. I've had the plan ready for some time. Tonight will be perfect. My handwriting is almost identical with Ralph's. I can prepare a suicide note—let it contain remorse over his allowing the Josie girl to die in California."

"I like that," Blake said grimly.

"Ralph has been up and down psychologically for years. He takes pills for it. There are doctors in the States who would testify suicide was always on the cards."

"So you write the note and then what?"

"He's drunk right now. We'll top him up even further, then we'll take him away in the car. Leave Rudi here. Drive to one of the bridges, late enough so traffic is sparse. When the way is clear, out of the car and over the railing. Then we abandon the car there with the note taped to the steering wheel."

They went back inside the club and found it deserted. "Rudi?" Blake called and Tina chimed in with, "Ralph?"

"Who dat up dere?" Blake sang in an imitation of Woody Herman, "who dat down dere?" He found a tin of beer behind the bar.

"Ralph is the one we're supposed to make drunk," Tina said.

"Don't worry about me."

Coldstream's voice sounded from the top of the stairs. "I thought you'd all gone home."

"We were out back," Blake said. "Where's Farris?"

"Don't ask me. Snap the lock on the door when you go out."

They waited—they could think of nothing else to do. Half an hour later, Farris came in through the front entrance looking the worse for wear. Tina asked him, "Where have you been?"

"Taking care of unfinished business. Rudi gone over the hill?"

"You need a drink." Tina poured him what looked like a half pint of scotch whisky. He drank it down as if it were lemonade. Later, when her brother was in an armchair with his head on his chest, Tina said, "Time to let little Ralphie get to sleep."

Sharing the load, they got Farris out of the club and across the pavement into the back seat of the Daimler. Tina took the wheel and drove at a careful pace through the streets of central London. On the embankment, she reduced speed further, hugging the left

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lane as they passed bridge after bridge. "We're spoiled for choice," she said.

"Pick one that isn't too brightly lit," Blake said.

They passed the Albert Bridge, illuminated like a fairy castle. Next came Battersea Bridge, a somber span by comparison. Tina drove halfway across, parked, and switched off the lights. They sat without speaking. Farris breathed heavily and regularly behind them. Cars thundered past at speed on the embankment but traffic across the bridge was zero.

"Well," she said, "are we going to do this thing?" First she took the note from her pocket and a roll of cellulose tape. She tore off a strip and fastened the paper to the wheel. Then they got out onto the sidewalk, opened the back door, and dragged Ralph from the seat. He gave them a certain amount of stumbling help as far as the chest-high railing. As they boosted him up, his eyes opened and he seemed to become aware of the night, the space in front of him, the silver-streaked water far below. Blake felt resistance in the slack muscles, but it was too late for Farris. He was beyond the edge and falling forward, turning once and halfway again before he struck the water. "Don't make a fuss, Ralph," Tina said quietly.

He did not come back to the surface as far as they could see. They watched the water for about a minute before Blake said, "Let's get out of here."

Shoulder to shoulder, heads down, they hurried back to the Chelsea side, leaving the parked Daimler looking more like a hearse than ever. After walking a couple of blocks toward the West End without speaking, Tina hailed an approaching taxi. "I'm going back to the club," she said as the cab slowed to pick them up. "It makes sense for me to be there if Ralph took the car by himself. Can I drop you off?"

"I think I'll walk," Blake said. He was coming back into possession of his arms and legs. Everything felt heavy.

"Keep the faith, then," she told him as she slammed the door and the taxi drove away.

Blake took the long way home. He rested on various benches, lost his way in small residential squares without much caring. The sky lightened and early-shift workers went by in buses and cars. By the time he dragged himself into Cambridge Circus, it was almost seven o'clock and he felt as if he had fought a war.

Upstairs in his apartment, he drank an Alka-Seltzer to quiet his stomach, then he made toast and coffee. After eating, he fell asleep

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in an armchair by the open window, comforted by fresh air and noise from the street. The telephone woke him at half past ten.

"Get over here," Rudi said. "We've had a visit from the police."

That was quick work, Blake told himself as he hurried through Soho. The cops had fished out Farris's body and connected it with the abandoned car.

But this was not the case. When he came into the club, Tina gave him owl eyes over the rim of her coffee mug. Coldstream looked from one of them to the other. "I get the feeling," he said, "you two have been busy."

"What did the police say?"

"That a certain Ralph Farris came to them last night and confessed to having allowed a girl to drown a few years ago when she fell off his yacht in L.A. Tantamount to manslaughter. It was a famous case, the cops here had heard of it. They took a statement from Farris, who wanted to clear his conscience. They've been through to their American colleagues and will be told soon whether the Yanks want to reopen the file. He told them they could reach him here."

"I didn't know Ralph had a conscience," Tina said. "People always surprise you."

"If the man has suddenly got religion," Rudi said, "will it affect our scheme for the videos?"

Blake looked at his partner in crime. "We'd better tell him," he said.

"We executed the plan last night," she said, "Milton and I. The one you and I discussed with the suicide note and the drowning. Ralph is dead."

The club owner thought about that. "So it won't be me and you after all, Tina," he said. "No jazz festival at the big house in Connecticut."

"I never liked the idea," she said. "The crowds and all the noise. I expect I'll buy the old place and go back to living there. And from what he says, Milt will return to Montreal. We'll be close." She poured more coffee. "Is that right, Milt darling?".

Blake was watching his old friend. There was a hard light in the Coldstream eyes. He knew Rudi well enough to understand he would not appreciate them taking the money and leaving him alone. He was more than capable of going to the police and telling them the whole sordid story.

"We'll have to wait and see," Blake said.

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FREE CATALOG. Used hardback mystery, crime and detective books. Steve Powell, Dept. DP, The Hideaway, Bar Harbor, ME 04609.

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HARDBACK, paperback mysteries, $3 up. Send stamp. Detective-Mystery Booksearch, P.O. Box 15460, Orlando, FL 32858-5460.

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$1,000 Weekly Home Business Directory. Free Details. Name and address to: Box 1610-EQ, Darien, Connecticut, 06820-1610.

STAY HOME! MAKE MONEY ADDRESSING ENVELOPES. VALUABLE GENUINE OFFER. 20¢. Write Lindco, 3636-DA Peterson Ave., Chicago, IL 60559.

THERE IS NO CHARGE FOR THE ZIP CODE: please use it when ordering merchandise from classified advertisements. You'll receive faster delivery.

$600 plus possible weekly. Easy, part time work at home. Quick cash. (415) 763-6099.

$1,000.00 WEEKLY! Seven most profitable home businesses. SSI Books, 415 South Oxford/Suite 124, Los Angeles, Calif. 90020.

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SEVEN MOST PROFITABLE HOME BUSINESSES REVEALED!! Send SASE—Free Details: Praster Publications, D-2, 105 Sierra Way, Suite 401, Milpitas, CA 95035.

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INVENTIONS wanted! Patents financed! PATENTVESTMENTS INTERNATIONAL, 1050 Connecticut Ave. NW, Suite 300, Washington, DC 20036.

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FAST-Action Loans by mail! Any Amount! Any Purpose! Fast-Easy-Confidential! Free Details! Creditmasters, Box 507-ELQ, Floral Park, New York 11002.

VISA, Mastercard. No bank account required. Poor credit okay. Quick cash loans. (415) 763-9396.

ERASE BAD CREDIT information from Credit Bureau files! Free details. New Horizons, Dept. 21, Box 445, North Dartmouth, MA 02747.

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EASY BUSINESS! Earn $1,000's Weekly! Free details. Write or Send Stamped Addressed Envelope: Toddco, Dept. 3, 4219 West Olive Avenue, Burbank, CA 91505.

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES—Cont'd

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ENGLISH MURDER MOST FOUL TOUR, air from New York, Murder Weekend, 8 nights hotel, car, some meals, $935 per person, double occupancy. Brochure. FACETS 212-505-2631, 800-TRAV-800.

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ELLERY QUEEN

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING ORDER FORM

Send to **ELLERY QUEEN MAGAZINE**
Classified Advertising Department/Suite 1401
380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017

20 WORD MINIMUM
Only $59.00 for 20 Words or Less
$2.95 each additional word
Capitalized words add—40¢ per word
SAVE 15% WITH 3 CONSECUTIVE MONTHS SAME COPY ORDER

DEADLINE: Copy and payment must be in by the 5th day of the third preceding month for issue in which ad is to appear.

(PLEASE PRINT OR TYPE)

YOUR NAME_____

FIRM (NAME IN AD)_____

ADDRESS_____

CITY_____ **STATE**_____ **ZIP**_____

PHONE:_____ **DATE:**_____

YOUR SIGNATURE_____

_____ Words at $2.95 each $ .....

_____ Capitalized word at .40¢ each _____
Total amount for 1 ad $

15% Savings with 3 Consecutive Months Discount

(a) Multiply one ad total $_____ x 3 = $ .....
(b) Multiply total amount on above line by _____ x .85
(c) Total amount for 3 ads $

(Example. One 20 word ad $59.00 x 3 months = $177.00 x .85 = $150.45)

$_____ is enclosed for _____ insertion(s) in the _____ issue(s) _____ Heading

(FOR ADDITIONAL WORDS ATTACH SEPARATE SHEET)

(1) **$59.00**	(2) **$59.00**	(3) **$59.00**	(4) **$59.00**	(5) **$59.00**
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(16) **$59.00**	(17) **$59.00**	(18) **$59.00**	(19) **$59.00**	(20) **$59.00**
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(26) **$76.70**	(27) **$79.65**	(28) **$82.60**	(29) **$85.55**	(30) **$88.50**

HOW TO COUNT WORDS: Name and address must be included in counting the number of Words in your ad. Each initial or number counts as 1 word: Mark Holly, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017: 7 WORDS: Zip codes are not counted. Phone #: 2 Words. Symbols used as keys are charged for. City or State count as 1 word each.: Garden City, New York: 2 words. Abbreviations such as C.O.D., F.O.B., P.O., U.S.A. 7x10, 35mm count as 1 word. (P.O. Box 145 count as 3 words) Webster's International Unabridged Dictionary will be used as our authority for spelling, compound words, hyphens, abreviations, etc. **Please make checks payable to ELLERY QUEEN MAGAZINE.**

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12 *NEW* stories — including

EDWARD D. HOCH (about Captain Leopold)
ANNA CLARKE (about a silver teapot)
GEORGE BAXT (about a woman who cried wolf)
IAN STUART (about Dicker McLeish's girl)
CLARK HOWARD (about Lew McCulla's kid)
ROBERT TWOHY (about the raven)
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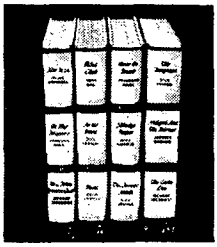
There is never a minimum number of books to buy, and you may return any unwanted selection within 21 days and owe nothing. And of course, you may cancel your membership at any time. As one of the oldest book clubs in America, we want you to be satisfied. Simply fill out the coupon and return it to: The Detective Book Club, Roslyn, NY 11576.



Please enroll me as a member and send me my four triple-volumes shown here, containing twelve mysteries. I enclose no money now. I'll examine them for one week, then will either accept them for $1 plus shipping, or return them and owe nothing.

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5-JZ

THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB, Roslyn, NY 11576

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Mr./Mrs./Ms._____

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PUBLISHED BY
WALTER J. BLACK, INC.
ESTABLISHED 1923

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DETECTIVERSE

DEADLY REFLECTIONS

by WILLIAM F. SMITH

"My mug's so ugly," mused Scarface Will,
"I half believe my looks could kill.
If this were true, then with a glance
I'd put my partner in a trance—
Or, better, with a single glower
I'd strike him dead within the hour.
That scum has caused me too much strife—
He stole my money and my wife.
It would give me great delight
To see him fry within my sight.
My eyes would generate such heat,
He'd decompose right at my feet.
But looks can't kill, it's sad to say—
I wish it were the other way."
Dejected, Scarface shook his head,
Glanced in a mirror, and dropped dead.

© 1985 by William F. Smith.

FINAL NOTICE

by SONYA PICKUS

A library worker named Sue
Spotted one of a larcenous crew.
When asked how she came
To remember his name,
She said, "*Justice* was long overdue."

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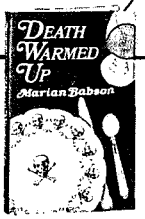
You're invited to the trial.



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A mouth-watering mystery morsel.
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Family reunion turns deadly.
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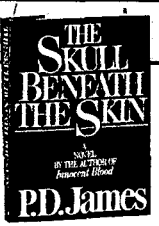

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Death notes are sent to the cast before and after a murder.
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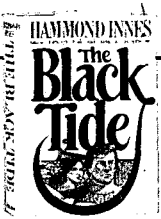
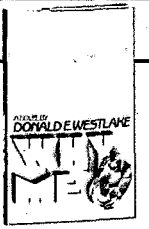


THE BLACK TIDE, by Hammond Innes.
High seas tale of deadly vengeance.
Pub. List $16.95



WHY ME, by Donald E. Westlake.
Casual gem theft leads to havoc.
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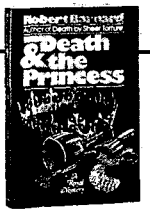

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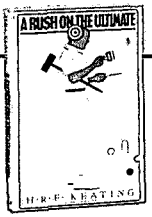

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